

THE STRUCTURE AND OPERATION OF ASSESSMENT BOARDS

Procedures for the Conduct of Assessment Boards

Approved by Academic Development Committee

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1. Introduction

This Handbook provides information for Internal and External Examiners for Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught programmes at Manchester Metropolitan University. It should be read in conjunction with the current academic regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The University regulations are reviewed periodically and published to students, staff and External Examiners on the University's web site: http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/grad_regulations.php.

The University has referred to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice: sections 4 and 6, External Examining and Assessment of Students, in defining its policies and procedures for the operation of Assessment Boards.

Degree awarding powers are vested in the Board of Governors of the University. It has delegated this responsibility to Academic Board, which in turn has delegated authority to the Assessment Boards in order to ensure that the Academic Regulations are applied consistently and fairly to individual students and to confer awards. The Academic Board is ultimately responsible for assuring academic standards and quality for all provision offered and validated by the University. This responsibility is devolved to the University Academic Development Committee (ADC), which is responsible for setting and monitoring standards.

The University has an academic framework in which programmes are made up of units of varying size. Exceptions to credit values are permitted if validated, e.g., to meet professional body requirements. Units will be considered at one appropriate Unit Results Board. The Combined Honours Framework allows the combination of units from more than one Department.

The University operates a two-tiered Assessment Board structure:

The Unit Results Board is responsible for a set of units. The Board carries full responsibility for considering the performance of students in individual units, groups of units and the confirmation of unit results.

Within the structure there is provision for Progression and Award Boards to meet. However, the Student Record System (SRS) Assessment Module is used to calculate unit results, progression and awards. Progression and Award Boards are responsible for confirming that University regulations have been correctly applied, reviewing performance trends. A separate set of guidance notes exists to underpin the implementation and operation of the SRS Assessment Module. There is provision within the structure for programmes, which need to satisfy the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, to establish Boards which can meet more often and operate differently. ADC encourages Faculties to conform to the University standard wherever possible.

In the interests of expediency, Faculties shall determine whether to organise separate resit Unit Results/ Progression and Award Boards or to combine boards.

A schedule of assessment activity will require that Internal and External Examiners are involved in assessment processes throughout the year. Structured and thorough preparation is seen as essential to the integrity of the Assessment Board process and is pivotal to its success.

The calendar of activities presents the sequence of events, which must occur to provide assurance of standards and adequate time to check the SRS Assessment Module set up, mark and moderate assessment, the collation of results and provide timely feedback to students. This schedule is designed to minimise the need for correction following the Unit Results Board. It has been the practice in some Faculties to operate Preliminary Boards ("Pre-boards") to some boards of examiners in order to confirm the accuracy of the unit marks. As part of the implementation of new assessment board structures, pre-boards will no longer take place: some of their functions will be carried out by the new Unit Results Board; and others will be undertaken by Unit and Programme Leaders.

The structure provides for the consideration of qualitative and quantitative data on student performance in assessment, which informs programme and unit strategies for the enhancement of standards and quality.

2. Preparation for and monitoring the operation of Assessment Boards

There are number of tasks which must be undertaken to assure the success of the Assessment Boards. Academic and Administrative staff all contribute to this preparation. Please refer to sections 8 to 12 inclusive for more detail of the roles specific to individuals.

Heads of Faculty/ Campus SAS will be responsible for ensuring that administrative staff undertake the necessary preparatory work and prepare paperwork for Assessment Boards within agreed deadlines.

Deans of Faculties are ultimately responsible for ensuring that academic staff fulfil their roles as required, which includes preparing commentaries on Board statistics.

Academic Development Committee will receive an annual review of the operation of Assessment Boards.

3. Calendar of Activities

Each Faculty/ Campus SAS will produce a calendar of assessment activity which complies with the SRS Assessment Module arrangements and which takes account of the University's Institutional Code of Practice: Assessment of Students.

4. Schedule and Composition of Assessment Boards

- Confirmation of the dates of University Assessment Boards in the Summer term of preceding year (for the following year);
- The assigning of units to a Unit Results Board will be approved by FADC/ University Programmes Board;
- Where appropriate, Progression and Awards Boards will be constituted so that the performance of students on similar programmes/ courses may be compared. Where PSRB requirements do not allow for this, FADC must approve the constitution of a separate board

5. Appointment of Board Chairs, Secretaries and External Examiners

- Deans of Faculties (or equivalent) will nominate Chairs of Assessment Boards;
- Chairs of Boards will be a senior academic;
- Heads of Faculty/ Campus SAS will ensure that Secretaries are appointed to Assessment Boards and are trained in assessment processes and the University Regulations;
- Unit Results Board External Examiners will be appointed to discrete Subject areas. Progression and Awards Board External Examiners will be appointed to Faculty/ Department Progression and Awards Boards. All appointments must be approved by ADC.

6. The Purpose and Responsibility of the Unit Results Board

(i) Terms of Reference

- To confirm that student assessment has been conducted in accordance with the University Academic Regulations and criteria published to students in unit guides;
- To confirm that moderation processes have been employed in the setting and marking of assessment;
- To formally approve unit assessment results for all students enrolled and registered for units belonging to the Board;
- To ensure that reassessment arrangements are in place for students who need to redeem failure;
- To receive and apply decisions contained within the reports of the relevant Exceptional Factor Panel(s);
- To provide a summary on unit performance, based on statistics generated from the SRS Assessment Module, in order to allow the comparison of performance of units;
- Where appropriate, to nominate students for prizes and to report to the relevant Progression and Awards Board;
- To confirm that standards achieved by MMU students in the unit results are comparable to benchmark standards;
- To verify that all these matters and actions have been completed accurately through the reports.

(ii) Membership

- Chair shall be a senior academic, nominated by the Dean, with no association with the teaching of subjects owned by the Board;
- External Examiner for each Subject owned by the Unit Results Board;
- Subject Leader for each Subject owned by the Board;

- Unit leader (or nominee) for each unit owned by the Board. All units must be represented at the Board;

Although not a member of the Board, a secretary nominated by Head of Faculty and Campus SAS shall be in attendance.

(iii) Responsibilities of Board members

- To prepare for and attend scheduled meetings and undertake any actions required of them by the Board;
- The Chair of the Board to follow up any actions deemed necessary by the Board prior to the Progression and Awards Board;
- The Secretary ensure changes to the SRS Assessment Module records for marks/ grades tabled at the Board and to provide a record of the business of the Board;
- The Secretary to assist the Chair to close out any actions necessary before the Progression and Awards Board;
- The Secretary to forward nominations for prizes to the Progression and Awards Board.

(iv) Documentation required by the Board:

- Record of Chair's actions since the last meeting;
- The University Undergraduate and/ or Postgraduate Regulations;
- The report of the relevant Exceptional Factor Panel(s);
- Unit Board Reports for all units owned by the Board;
- Mean and standard deviation for each unit, provided by the SRS Assessment Module;
- Where relevant, comparative performance of cohorts studying individual units;
- Where relevant, comparative performance of units for each Subject/ cognate set of units within the Unit Results Board by level of study;
- Summary statistics on the incidence of Academic Misconduct under investigation and concluded for each Subject/ cognate set of units within the Unit Results Board, which highlights potential risk to the integrity of the assessment process;

7. The Purpose and Responsibility of the Progression and Awards Board

(i) Terms of reference

General

- To confirm that University and Programme/ Course regulations have been applied consistently and fairly for all students studying on programmes/ courses belonging to the Board;
- To agree condonement for students who have narrowly failed a unit and meet the conditions for condonement, if appropriate.
- To provide opportunities for the monitoring of quality and standards through the consideration of data in relation to progression and achievement.

Progression

- To confirm resit prescriptions for students unable to proceed, taking into account any condonements;
- To confirm a student's right to progress on the programme/ course for which s/he is enrolled;

- To consider and compare progression and condonement statistics for programmes/ courses belonging to the Board and recommend future strategy, where appropriate.

Award

- To confirm each student's award and classification;
- To consider student achievement using classification statistics;
- To agree the recommendation of an interim award for students unable to achieve their award aim under the University/ Programme/ Course Regulations;
- Confirm recipients of prizes.

(ii) Membership

- The Chair shall be a senior academic nominated by the Dean;
- Award External Examiner;
- Programme/ course leader (or nominee) or others with programme level responsibility for each programme/ course owned by the Board. All programmes/ courses must be represented at the Board;

Although not a member of the Board, a secretary, nominated by Head of Faculty and Campus SAS shall be in attendance.

(iii) Responsibilities of Board members

- Programme/ course leaders must be familiar with programme/ course/ University regulations for the students whose profiles they review;
- Programme/ course leaders must prepare for and attend scheduled meetings and undertake any actions required of them by the Board;
- The Chair and Secretary of the Board must be proficient in the course and University regulations for students whose profiles will be examined;
- The Chair of the Board must follow up any actions deemed necessary by the Board;
- The Secretary to provide a record of actions agreed by the Board and make changes to the SRS Assessment Module records as required by the Board;
- The Chair to report to the Head of Faculty/ Campus SAS the identity of recipients of Faculty/ Department prizes.

(iv) Documentation required by the Board

General

- Record of Chair's actions since the last meeting;
- The University Undergraduate and/ or Postgraduate Regulations;

Progression

- Profiles of performance for all progressing students studying the courses owned by the Board;
- Where possible, progression rates by cohort and level for each programme/ course for three years (including the current year) before resit and after resit;

Award

- Award and Classification rates by cohort and level for each course for three years, including the current year, before resit and after resit;
- Comparative statistics of performance for all courses for three years, before resit and after resit;
- Comparative statistics of classification for all programmes/ courses and other University Faculties for three years;
- Profiles of performance for students studying the courses owned by the Board;

8. The Role of the Subject External Examiner

Please refer to the University's Institutional Code of Practice and Regulations for External Examining: Section 3.9 for details of the powers and responsibilities of Subject External Examiners.

9. The Role of the Award External Examiner

Please refer to the University's Institutional Code of Practice and Regulations for External Examining: Section 3.14 for details of the powers and responsibilities of Award External Examiners.

10. The Role of the Unit Leader

The Unit Leader has responsibility to ensure that:

- They are familiar with and understand the University Regulations;
- The unit specification states clearly the validated assessment regime and that the unit teaching team and students understand this regime, e.g. what assessment has to be passed (components), deadlines for submission of assessment and the relative weightings of each assessment;
- The SRS Assessment Module is set up correctly according to the unit assessment regime;
- If any revision is made to the unit, it is approved by FADC in accordance with University regulations;
- Assessment criteria are published for students;
- Assessment tasks are approved in accordance with University policy (including internal and external approval);
- Examination papers and resit papers, together with relevant worked solutions, where appropriate, are submitted by the published deadline;
- Any revised submission dates for coursework is approved by the Head of Department/ Programme Leader;
- Assessed work is collected promptly, held securely whilst it is marked and marked in accordance with assessment criteria;
- Marking is moderated and evidenced in accordance to University policy;
- All results are recorded, following moderation, using the SRS Assessment Module, as marking is completed;
- Unit results are recorded and calculated by published deadlines;

- Marks are recorded accurately, in accordance with the Assessment Module guidelines;
- Informative and useful feedback on coursework is provided to students in a timely manner and accordance with University policy;
- Where there are missing grades or a student is not registered, every effort is made to check and resolve the matter prior to the Board;
- The Programme Leader and Head of Department are consulted where academic misconduct is suspected;
- Using the statistical data provided by Planning and Management Information, brief comments are recorded on the unit delivery and cohort performance for presentation to the Board;
- A sample of assessed work is prepared for moderation by the External Examiner in accordance with University policy;
- Attends the Board, or arranges for a nominee, to present the results;
- Where an error is identified, that the Chair of the Board is contacted immediately so that appropriate action is taken to ensure that the correct mark is approved prior to the Progression and Awards Board.

11. The Role of the Head of Department

The Head of Department has responsibility to ensure that:

- They are familiar with and understand the University Regulations;
- All units delivered are allocated to a Unit Results Board;
- They verify the accurate inputting of all unit marks;
- The published Assessment Board schedule includes all appropriate Unit Results Boards and the information contained within the schedule is correct, e.g. the correct External Examiner is allocated to the Board;
- An External Examiner is appointed to moderate all level 5, 6 and 7 units and is briefed on his/ her duties and reviews level 3 and 4 units where appropriate;
- Moderation arrangements are agreed with External Examiners and Unit Leaders are informed of arrangements;
- Internal moderation arrangements are agreed and Unit Leaders are informed of Department policy;
- Arrangements are made to cover marking for academic staff who are absent due to illness or other Department priorities;
- Liaise appropriately with the Chair of the Unit Results Board.

12. The Role of the Programme Leader

The Programme Leader has responsibility to ensure that:

- They are familiar with and understand the University Regulations;
- They are familiar with and understand the programme/ course regulations;
- The definitive documentation states clearly the programme/ course specific regulations;
- Changes to programme/ course regulations are approved by FADC or relevant committee;
- They are familiar with and understand the coding used in Assessment Boards to record a student's status;
- Students at risk of failure are counselled;
- Where a student's profile of results is incomplete, every effort is made to resolve queries prior to the Progression and Award Board meeting;
- They attend the Progression and Award Board to present recommendations (or arrange for a nominee to do so);

- Where an error is identified, appropriate remedial action is carried out immediately and forwarded to the Chair of the Progression and Awards Board;
- Where they are responsible for a programme/ course delivered in whole or part by a partner institution, they regularly brief the institution of its requirements in meeting deadlines for the transfer of marks to the SRS Assessment Module and attendance at Assessment Boards.

13. Chairing and Secretarial Support of the Board

The Chair and Secretary must work together to ensure a successful outcome of the assessment process. The Chair is considered to be the guardian of the regulations and policy, ensuring an equality of experience for each student, while the Secretary is considered to be the guardian of the official record of the assessment process. The Secretary should also have a good knowledge of the regulations and policies in order to act as an advisor to the Chair if required.

In order to achieve impartiality, the Chair should be somewhat removed from the programme/ subject area and should be a senior member of academic staff with excellent knowledge of the regulations and assessment policy, while the Secretary should be an experienced administrator with knowledge of the regulations, assessment policy and competent in report-writing skills.

(i) Key responsibilities of the Chairperson:

- to agree in consultation with the appropriate Dean/ Heads of Department, and in accordance with the membership terms of reference, the internal members of the Assessment Board;
- to ensure all members of the Board are properly briefed;
- to liaise closely with the Secretary to the Board to ensure that the marks presented are full and correct;
- to ensure that the External Examiner has seen an appropriate sample of the assessed work of the students;
- to ensure full and frank discussion about the performance of students takes place, taking into account the views of the External Examiner, any reported exceptional factors and to guide the Board towards clear recommendations/ decisions;
- to consider and initiate such actions as he/she thinks necessary on advice given by the External Examiners;
- in close collaboration with the Secretary, ensure that marks and award recommendations as confirmed by the Board are prepared and checked;
- following the Board to check and approve the minutes as a true record of the proceedings;
- to ensure that the students receive appropriate notification of the results.

(ii) Key responsibilities of the Secretary:

- to establish the dates of meetings in advance at the start of each academic year, arrange the meetings and inform the members;
- to make all administrative arrangements for the Board including liaison with the External Examiner;
- draft agendas for approval by the Chair, to be disseminated to all members prior to the Board;
- prepare and provide the Board documentation;
- check profiles for students before the Board meets;
- to provide advice on examination and assessment regulations during the meeting;

- to produce a full and accurate record of the meeting;
- in conjunction with the Head of Faculty/ Campus SAS, to ensure that the marks presented to the Board are correct and that any amendments are actioned on the SRS Assessment Module;
- to record the conditions of re-assessment;
- to prepare pass lists and arrange for them to be checked by the Chair of the Board;
- to ensure results/ pass lists are communicated to students via the appropriate means;
- to ensure that unit results that have been taken by students from other Faculties are communicated to the student's home Faculty in a timely and appropriate manner.

14. Agendas and Reports

Agendas and reports are important to guide and record the business of the Board. A standard format is to be used. Reports should clearly record the decisions of the Board.

It is important to record in the Board Reports the candidates for whom supplementary information was considered (e.g. exceptional factors) and the reason for the Board's decision. If a student subsequently submits an academic appeal, the person dealing with the appeal may request to see the report of the Board to clarify whether and how any special circumstances were considered.

Each member of the Board (including External Examiners) should receive a notice of the meeting, well in advance, an agenda and finally the report, approved by the Chair as an accurate record. Non-members of the Board may be included in the distribution of agendas and Board Reports, for information. However non-members must be staff and treat the Board Reports as confidential.

The University's report template for External Examiner reports provides External Examiners with the opportunity to comment on individual units and other issues relating to the University's assessment and quality assurance procedures. Detailed comments expressed by External Examiners at the Board need, therefore, not be included in Assessment Board Reports. A statement indicating that formal External Examiner reports will contain full detail of commentary on the assessments and quality assurance process may be included at this point in the Board Reports. Examiners are required to submit their reports to the University within six weeks of the main Assessment Board with which they are involved, and programme teams are required to reflect on the report and to make comments and provide a formal written response on receipt of the report to provide evidenced and timely feedback.

The report of the External Examiner and the Board Reports should then be considered together as the assessment record of external input.

15. Conflicts of Interest

- (i) No student may be a member of an Assessment Board, or of any subsidiary examination committee appointed by it, or attend any examiners' meeting other than as a candidate for assessment. If, however, a person who is otherwise qualified to be an examiner for a course, such as a member of staff, is a student because they are registered on another course either within the University or in another Institution of Higher Education, that shall not in itself disqualify that person from carrying out normal examining commitments unless there should be a conflict of interests. Where there is any unavoidable potential clash of interests, the procedures below must be followed.
- (ii) Any member of the Assessment Board who is aware of any potential conflict of interest (for example, being related to, or a close friend of, any student registered on the degree programme for which that person is an examiner) must declare their interest as soon as the possibility arises and must not be the sole examiner for the student concerned on any individual contributory unit.

- (iii) Any examiner who has a potential conflict of interests as described above, must draw this to the attention of the Chair(s) of the appropriate Board(s) and the connection must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, and the person involved shall not take any part in any discussion covering the student(s) concerned, but may, at the discretion of the Chair, be permitted to remain in attendance for the duration of the discussion.

16. Exceptional Factors

Arrangements for the submission of exceptional factors are addressed within Appendix 2 of the University's Assessment Regulations (Undergraduate and Postgraduate): Procedures for the Submission and Consideration of Exceptional Factors affecting Student Performance. The decision of Exceptional Factors Panels shall be accepted by the Assessment Board without discussion.

17. Academic Malpractice

The Unit Results Board has no discretion to waive penalties imposed in accordance with the University's Academic Misconduct Procedures, neither does it have any authority to impose any penalty for alleged academic misconduct. Boards of Examiners must not attempt to re-hear or reconsider a case that has been already determined by an Assessment Disciplinary Committee. The function of the Board of Examiners is to implement the recommendation of the Assessment Disciplinary Committee having regard for any applicable regulations.

In the event of such an allegation coming to light at the meeting or being unresolved by the time of the meeting, the Unit Results Board will make its decisions in the normal way but will withhold them from the student until the outcome of Academic Misconduct Procedures is known.

18. Appeals

The University's Appeals Procedures are presented at Appendix 8 of the University's Assessment Regulations (Undergraduate and Postgraduate): Guidance Note on Academic Appeals.

The University's Appeals Procedures apply only to the decisions of Assessment Boards of the University. Where examinations are assessed externally, the University has no powers to reconsider assessment decisions.

The purpose of the Appeals Procedures is to enable a student, who believes s/he has a case under the regulations to request a review of a published decision of an Assessment Board. This procedure does not deal with disciplinary matters for which there is a separate procedure.

There is no right of appeal against the academic judgement of an Assessment Board. An appeal may only be lodged against a decision of an Assessment Board where a student believes that an administrative error or other material irregularity has occurred, or where there were personal circumstances which, had the Board been aware of them, might have affected its decision. The appellant must have good reason not to have used the University exceptional factors procedures. (Appendix 2: Procedures for the Submission and Consideration of Exceptional Factors affecting Student Performance).

19. Publication of Results

Arrangements for the publication of results are outlined in the statement of standard assessment procedures to underpin the implementation and operation of the SRS Assessment Module.

20. Chair's Action

Very exceptionally, there may be a need for the Unit Results Board or a Progression and Awards Board to take action to amend or confirm a decision after the Board meets. In such circumstance the Board may delegate responsibility to its Chair. The Chair of the Board must ensure that requisite University documentation is completed and that a summary of actions taken in this way is reported to the next meeting of the Board.

21. Annual Monitoring and the assessment process

It is good practice to consider Assessment Board reports as part of the annual monitoring process. This allows discipline level comments from External Examiners and results to be considered, even when the final External Examiner's report has not been received and processed. The use of detailed Assessment Board reports will allow programme teams to consider the specific subject/ discipline issues at the next point in the year where monitoring activity occurs. The final report can then be considered retrospectively at the next convenient monitoring opportunity.