

## **College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners**

### **Introduction**

1. This policy applies to programmes developed, approved and operated by Birkbeck, University of London. Programmes developed and approved in collaboration with other institutions should give due regard to this policy when considering the operation of boards and sub-boards of examiners
2. The College has authority, under University of London Regulation 1, paragraph 7, to award University of London degrees. Academic Board has delegated authority for these awards to College Boards of Examiners. College Boards of Examiners responsible for undergraduate programmes will be appointed annually by Academic Board to act for assessment to be held in the academic year, commencing 1 October. College Boards of Examiners responsible for postgraduate programmes will be appointed annually by Academic Board to act for assessment to be held in the calendar year commencing 1 January. Each board will consider all full and part time students registered for programmes within its remit. The terms of reference for the College Boards are attached as appendix one.
3. College Boards of Examiners will appoint Sub-Boards to make decisions and recommendations for specific programmes. The terms of reference for Sub-boards are attached as appendix two.
4. Academic Board may also appoint "Module" Sub-Boards; such sub-boards will consider marks for students for individual modules, but will not normally make recommendations for awards for programmes.
5. For the purposes of this document "external examiners" refers both to external and intercollegiate examiners.

### **Role of Boards of Examiners**

6. The role of any board or sub-board of examiners is approved by Academic Board and determined by their terms of reference.
7. Where a Sub-board considers an award for a student who has taken one or more modules that are not within that Sub-board's remit, then that Sub-board does not have authority to amend any decision taken by another Sub-board in relation to the module result(s) in question. The Sub-board may however use its discretion in relation to the confirmed module result when considering the recommendation of any award (see paragraph 9)
8. Students will normally be considered under the regulations that were operative at the time when they began their courses<sup>1</sup>.

### **Discretion**

9. In certain circumstances (for example when candidates fall 2.0 percentage points or fewer below a classification boundary), Sub-boards of Examiners may use their discretion to make recommendations or decisions that differ from that indicated within the regulations. Each Sub-board of Examiners will publish its own guidelines on the criteria which it may use for the exercise of discretion (for example exit velocity, measures of preponderance, unrepresentative performance). These criteria must conform with the regulations on

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<sup>1</sup> Please note however that the College's transitional arrangements for the implementation of the Common Awards Scheme may require students who have taken a break in study or otherwise "slowed down" during their programme to re-join the programme under the Common Awards Scheme regulations.

conferment. Where a Sub-Board exercises such discretion the resulting recommendation or decision should be clearly recorded in the meeting report, together with the reasons for use of this discretion.

## The Composition of Sub-Boards of Examiners

### Chairs of Boards

10. Each Sub-Board will have a Chair and a Deputy Chair, to be appointed by the relevant College Board and advised of their appointment by the Academic Registrar.
11. The Chair or in his/her absence the Deputy Chair of each Sub-board will be responsible for all communications between the Board and the College.
12. The Chair of a Sub-board will be a permanent member of the academic staff of the College.
13. The role of the Chair of the Sub-board is:
  - to ensure that the proceedings are managed in an efficient manner and that all students are treated equitably and within the College regulations and policies.
  - to invite the external examiners present to comment on the proceedings and arrangements for the Board, assessments and marking practices.
  - to be responsible for taking any action as appropriate on behalf of the board

### Examiners

14. Members of Sub-boards of Examiners will be designated as Examiners. Examiners may be:
  - (a) **Internal Examiners**, who are normally members of the academic staff of the College or sessional lecturers who have taught a module or modules within the Sub-board's remit and who are not also students at the College.
  - (b) **External Examiners**, who are not members of staff of the College.
  - (c) **Intercollegiate Examiners**, who are members of staff of Colleges of the University of London other than Birkbeck.

For further guidance on the role of external examiners and intercollegiate examiners please see the College Policy on the Role of External and Intercollegiate Examiners.

15. It is a requirement that at least one external examiner must be appointed to all Sub-boards of Examiners which have the responsibility for making recommendations for or determining award classifications. The Chair of each Sub-board will be responsible for determining the minimum possible number of external examiners necessary for the efficient conduct of the relevant Sub-board. Sub-boards should also consider whether they wish to appoint one or more intercollegiate examiners, in order to ensure the comparability of award across the University.
16. Each session, the College will determine the composition of all Sub-boards of Examiners and confirm the names of the Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary and the examiners on each Sub-Board

## **Assessors**

17. Assessors may be appointed, where necessary, to assist Sub-boards of Examiners in setting of papers in special subjects, or in special aspects of the main syllabi, to mark scripts and to attend practical examinations and oral presentations.
18. Assessors will not be members of Sub-boards of Examiners and shall not be entitled, unless invited, to attend meetings of the Sub-boards.

## **Assistant Examiners**

19. Assistant Examiners may be appointed by the Chair of a Sub-board of Examiners to assist in the marking of scripts at examinations where there are large numbers of candidates taking written papers or practical examinations.
20. Assistant Examiners may be required to attend practical examinations and / or oral presentations.
21. Assistant Examiners will not be members of Sub-boards of Examiners and will not be entitled to set papers nor, unless invited, to attend meetings of the Sub-boards.

## **The role(s) of the Secretary and Clerk**

22. The Secretary and Clerk may be the same or separate positions and will often be fulfilled by administrative staff. The Secretary and the Clerk will not normally be members of the Sub-board
23. The Secretary is responsible for advising the Chair and the Sub-board on any matters of policy, procedure or administrative practice.
24. The Secretary is responsible for advising the chair and Sub-board on the decisions of the mitigating circumstances committee in relation to any particular student and their assessment.
25. The Secretary is responsible for advising the chair and Sub-board of any assessment offences cases that have been reported. The Secretary should have a list of all pending cases and should confirm to the board the recommended decision and, if appropriate, the penalty on all completed cases.
26. The Clerk is responsible for receiving all marks for consideration and inputting them into the student records system and will normally be responsible for drafting the Sub-board report.
27. The Clerk is responsible for providing to the Sub-board a complete list of all work that has not been submitted by the deadline so that the Sub-board can impose penalties for late submission in accordance with the College policy. The Clerk is also responsible for ensuring that decisions of any relevant panels or sub-committees (such as any mitigating circumstances panel convened by the Sub-board) are conveyed to the Sub-board for consideration and/or endorsement.
28. The Clerk is responsible for updating all the marks on the student record system after the Sub-board has met.
29. The Secretary is responsible for ensuring that a final copy of the Sub-board report, having been amended after the Sub-board by the Clerk is approved and signed by the Chair of the Sub-board and sent to the relevant officer within the Registry.

## Operation of Sub-boards of Examiners

30. Meetings of examiners will normally be chaired by the nominated Chair of that Sub-board of Examiners. However, the deputy chair may preside at any meeting of Examiners where it is not possible for the Chair to attend.
31. No persons other than the members and designated administrative staff will be permitted to attend meetings of any Board or Sub-Board of Examiners, except that Assessors or Assistant Examiners may be invited to attend for discussion as required.
32. The Sub-board's recommendation for any final award will be determined at a meeting at which all Examiners should be invited, and which the Chair or Deputy Chair and at least one external examiner (not including any intercollegiate examiners) are required to be present<sup>2</sup>. The quorum for any meeting of a board of examiners will be two-thirds of the membership.
33. The views of external examiners are expected to be particularly influential in cases where there is disagreement on the recommendation for the final classification to be derived from the array of marks of a particular candidate. However the decision will be arrived at by majority vote of those present and voting. Where an external examiner expresses disagreement with the Sub-board's decision, this disagreement should be specifically noted in the report to the College Board of Examiners of the Sub-board's meeting.
34. The Chair will have a casting vote in addition to his/her own vote. Administrative officers do not have a vote.
35. A record will be kept within the Registry of each Sub-board meeting, in line with the requirements of the College's Records Retention Schedule. The record should include all decisions made, including recommendations for award, as well as brief details of discussions leading to these decisions and details of any use of discretion by the Sub-Board. Where a vote is taken, the record should indicate numbers for and against proposals, together with numbers of abstentions.
36. The report should be signed by all external examiners present at the meeting.
37. Examiners should be supplied with:
  - the credit value of the modules which they will be examining;
  - the regulations for progression and award of any programme(s) for which they are examiners;
  - Programme and module specifications and generic and subject specific marking criteria for the programme(s) / module (s) for which they are examiners;
  - College Policies on Marking and Moderation, Mitigating Circumstances, Late Submission of Assessment, Accredited Prior Learning and Assessment Offences;
  - Marks provisionally awarded for all modules on programme(s) within their remit;
  - Marks approved by other sub-boards for modules taken by students on programme(s) within their remit
38. In addition to assessed work supplied to examiners as part of the marking and moderation procedures, examiners should normally have access, wherever practical, to all examination scripts, written assessments and any records of non-written assessments for all modules that contribute to the classification of an award and have not previously been considered by the Sub-board for programme(s) within their remit. Examiners should request access to these scripts or records to the Secretary or Clerk to the Sub-board,

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<sup>2</sup> This includes "virtual" presence, such as video or internet link, where it is not possible for an external examiner to attend the actual meeting.

outlining the specific scripts or records that they wish to see and giving sufficient notice of any requirement.

39. Students will normally be considered for any award under the regulations that were operative at the time when they registered for their programme. The College has produced guidance on where this will not apply as part of the implementation of the Common Awards Scheme; this guidance is available from the Registry.

### **College Boards of Examiners**

40. The duties and constitution of the College Boards of Examiners is decided by the Academic Board and is defined within its terms of reference. Chairs of Sub-boards and external examiners of sub-boards are not normally required to attend meetings of the College Boards.
41. A College Board may empower the Chair of the College Board to act on its behalf in carrying out any or all of the duties outlined in its terms of reference.

### **Joint Sub-Boards**

42. A Joint Sub-board will be responsible for considering candidates referred to it for recommendations on the conferment of awards and, where appropriate, their classification. A Joint Sub-board will normally be established to consider recommendations for candidates for joint programmes where the fields of study concerned are not covered by a single Sub-board. For Major / Minor combinations the Sub-Board with responsibility for making recommendations for single subject awards in the "major" field of study will normally consider recommendations for candidates, but with representatives from the Sub-board normally responsible for considering recommendations for the "minor" field of study present during deliberations.
43. Any meeting of a Joint Sub-board at which recommendations for the classification of candidates is considered must be attended by (a) at least one external / intercollegiate examiner and (b) at least one internal examiner from each of the Sub-Boards concerned. It must, furthermore, normally be attended by at least one external examiner in each of the subjects named in the field of study. The relevant College Board shall decide which subjects and which Sub-Boards are concerned. If for any reason an external examiner in any of the principal subjects named in the field of study concerned cannot attend a meeting he/she must submit his/her views in writing to the Chair of the joint Sub-board before the meeting. The Joint Sub-board's report shall be signed by the external examiners present at the meeting.

### **Intercollegiate Boards**

44. Where two or more Colleges offer an intercollegiate course in any subject, the Colleges will agree the members and Chair of an Intercollegiate Sub-Board, which will have powers and functions similar to those set out in the terms of reference of Sub-boards of Examiners and be responsible for examining candidates on the course.
45. Every Intercollegiate Sub-Board will include in its membership at least one external examiner, from an institution not involved in the delivery of the programme. An Intercollegiate Sub-Board will report its recommendations on any candidate's performance to the Chair of the relevant College Board.

### **Publication of Examination Results**

46. Results are not confirmed until the relevant Sub-Board / College Board has considered and approved them.

47. Students will be notified by the Registry of their marks following confirmation by the relevant Sub-board.
48. Students who are eligible to be re-assessed or to re-take modules will be informed by their Schools. Schools will also be responsible for informing students of the logistical arrangements for any re-assessment.
49. The University, the College and all Examiners are required to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 which establishes legal rights for individuals with regard to the automatic processing of personal data, including assessment marks and results, on computing, word processing or similar equipment. In order to ensure that these obligations are met, Examiners are not permitted to retain examination data relating to identifiable individuals on their personal computers or similar equipment. Examiners must comply with the instructions issued by the College on the storage of data relating to identifiable individuals on departmental computers. A data subject may seek compensation through the Courts for any damage or associated distress by reason of the inaccuracy or loss of personal data relating to him/her, or by access being obtained to it or its disclosure except as authorised in these instructions.
50. The assessment marks of individual students, may be released on request, subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, to public bodies such as the British Academy, the DES Scottish Office, the DES Northern Ireland Office and the Research Councils for the purposes of assessing applications for studentships for postgraduate degrees; and to institutions of higher education within the United Kingdom for the purposes of credit transfer.

### **Representations from Candidates**

51. Chairs and examiners must not communicate with candidates on behalf of their Board or Sub-board about their performance. Any representation which a candidate may make in connection with his/her assessment must be referred to the Academic Registrar of the College in accordance with the procedure outlined in the College Procedure for Appeals Against Decisions of Boards of Examiners

Academic Board  
February 2012

## **COLLEGE BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONSTITUTION**

The terms of reference of College Boards of Examiners for all programmes and modules within the Board's purview are:

1. To consider recommendations from Sub-Boards of Examiners and to approve awards to candidates on behalf of Academic Board;
2. To consider recommendations from Sub-Board of Examiners relating to the termination of registration for individual students from the programme and / or College in line with the regulations and procedure relating to the termination of registration due to academic failure;
3. To consider the use of discretion by Sub-Boards of Examiners in making recommendations of awards to candidates and to report to Academic Board on the consistency of this use;
4. To consider the use of discretion by Sub-Boards of Examiners in the award of "Compensated Fails" to candidates, and to report to Academic Board on the consistency of this use;
5. To consider the treatment by Sub-Boards of Examiners of applications for consideration of mitigating circumstances by candidates, and to report to Academic Board on the consistency of this treatment;
6. To review reports from Sub-Boards of Examiners on numbers of candidates permitted to undertake reassessment and numbers required to re-take modules;
7. To analyse trends relating to awards made by the College across subjects and across years;
8. To consider responses from Sub-Boards of Examiners to reports from External Examiners, requesting any further consideration or referring matters to other bodies as appropriate.
9. To consider any other matters referred by Academic Board.

### **CONSTITUTION**

The constitution of College Boards of Examiners is:

A Chair appointed by Academic Board

2 Members of Academic Board from each School that offers programmes or modules within the College Board's remit

An intercollegiate examiner appointed by Academic Board

An external examiner appointed by Academic Board

The Academic Registrar will nominate a Secretary to the Board. The Secretary will not be a member of the Board.

## SUB-BOARDS OF EXAMINERS

### TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONSTITUTION

The terms of reference of Sub-Boards of Examiners for all programmes within the Sub-Board's purview are:

1. to nominate external examiners for the Sub-Board as appropriate;
2. to be responsible for the setting of assessments, including examination papers, and to ensure that regulations and policies relating to assessment have been followed correctly;
3. to be responsible for the setting of marking schemes for programmes not included in the Common Awards Scheme<sup>3</sup>;
4. to approve marks for all elements of assessment and overall module results and to determine which students have passed or failed individual modules within the Sub-Board's remit;
5. to determine for students who have not passed a module whether they should be permitted to be re-assessed in one or more elements of assessment or retake the module concerned in line with the relevant assessment regulations;
6. to determine the format and timing of all reassessments;
7. to make decisions on the progression of students to the following academic year, where appropriate.
8. to assign, at the Sub-Board's discretion, a compensated fail to students who have fulfilled the appropriate criteria;
9. to apply the College's Policy on Late Submission;
10. to form, at the Sub-Board's discretion, a mitigating circumstances panel, to assess applications for mitigating circumstances and inform the Sub-Board of their recommendations, in line with the College Policy on Mitigating Circumstances;
11. to consider the recommendations of the relevant mitigating circumstances panel in determining a decision regarding an element of assessment or overall module result;
12. to ensure that, where an investigation into an assessment offence is ongoing, any mark or overall module result related to the alleged offence is withheld until such time as the investigation is concluded;
13. to consider and make recommendations for the termination of registration (exclusion) from the programme and College in line with the regulations and procedure relating to the termination of registration due to academic failure;

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<sup>3</sup> Programmes not included in the Common Awards Scheme will normally only include programmes for which professional body requirements preclude their inclusion, some programmes offered in partnership with other organisations or where existing pre-CAS programmes are being discontinued. Any new programme should gain the specific approval of Academic Board to be offered outside of the Scheme.

14. to consider reports from external examiners, making responses and recommendations to the relevant College Board of Examiners as appropriate.
15. to oversee, in accordance with the College's Admissions Policy, admission to programmes of study within the sub-board's remit.

Where a Sub-Board is responsible for making recommendations on the conferment of awards, the Sub-Boards will also:

15. recommend awards and classifications<sup>2</sup> in line with the appropriate regulations and the individual programme specification;
16. make recommendations for and/or approve aegrotat<sup>3</sup> awards in accordance with the conferment regulations.
17. ensure that any candidate who satisfies the minimum requirements is recommended the appropriate award.

## **CONSTITUTION**

The constitution of Sub-Boards of Examiners is as outlined in the College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners

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<sup>2</sup> Classification: Shall relate to any classification of an award whether it be undergraduate honours classification (first, upper second etc) or distinction, merit and pass employed on other undergraduate or postgraduate awards.

<sup>3</sup> See Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study, Regulation 62