Board of Examiners notes – Updates for 2020/21

Impact of strike action

The Boards of Examiners should consider any cumulative impact in relation of strike action in 2017/2018 and in 2019/20 in line with the guidance provided previously.

Whilst it is likely that the decisions made at the time remain appropriate, Boards of Examiners should consider this in the light of the impact of the subsequent Covid-19 pandemic. In the rare occurrence that that the mitigation put in place at the time of the strike should be amended, this should be recorded in the minutes.

Impact of Covid-19 2020-21

The College has made several adjustments to policies and procedures to mitigate against the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic during 2020-21. We have updated this guidance note for Boards of Examiners where these adjustments are relevant to the work of the Board.

Running the Boards during remote working

All Examinations Boards still to be held will need to run remotely for 2020/21. Where dates of Boards have been set and agreed with external examiners, these should be stuck to as far as possible.

At the time of producing this guidance for the 2019-20 academic year it was noted that Teams is the only platform supported by ICT suitable for running Boards, and that they would not confirm the security/GDPR compliance of other platforms. Therefore, the Regulations and Policy Review Committee strongly recommend that this is the platform that is used to run remote Boards. Support for Teams can be found at https://www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/ict/self-service/connect-communicate/office-365/apps/microsoft-teams/

There are a number of factors that need to be considered in preparing for the Boards this year which may impact on the decision of each Board as to how they wish to proceed. Support and guidance from ICT on secure remote working including distribution of files can be found at http://www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/ict/self-service/be-secure/.

When ensuing compliance with data protection legislation (GDPR) in relation to Boards of Examiners there a number of factors that need to be considered.

In preparing for Boards decisions will need to be made with regards to:

- How will participants of the Board access the papers?
  - Using screen share in the meeting.
  - Secure sharing though SharePoint or meeting platform file sharing processes.
  - Visibility of Board sheets on screens (will this mean changing the format of existing Board paperwork to accommodate? Is this possible at this juncture?).
- Ensure security of student data
  - Deleting papers from email/drives/home systems.
Papers as distributed are anonymous. This should also include any hidden meta data in the file.

Where Board papers are not anonymous as exemption has been granted by the Registry that all those that receive the information are reminded of their responsibilities to delete from their systems (including the junk/delete folder).

Using suitable encryption when sending papers or enabling access.

- Physical location of participants
  - All participants need to ensure that they are accessing the meeting as far as possible in a confidential space.
  - In addition to the physical location (country) that the participant of the meeting is, they must also consider where any data they are accessing is held or passing through. For example, the internet service provider’s servers or email platform is utilised to access papers must also be compliant with GDPR as they are within the EU or covered by other agreements such as the EU-US privacy shield.

- How will participants be invited to join the meeting
  - What security is in place to ensure only those that are supposed to be present are able to join (password protection, meeting locking etc.)
  - Ensure that External Examiners and others external to the College network are invited, and have the capacity to participate in, the meeting.

Further information on GDPR can be found on the College webpages at https://www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/secretariat/information-governance/data-protection/gdpr/.

Covid-19 - Dealing with missing marks or not being able to access marked scripts which are locked on Campus

Within each department/area a formal decision will needed to deal with issues in accessing scripts which are currently physically at the College. A local decision with regards to who and how this will take place should be made. Any access to the College will need to be granted by the relevant FOO.

Care should be taken to support the quality assurance mechanisms for marking and ratification of results. As circumstances will differ between areas, each should consult with their External Examiners as to how to proceed. It may be that these decisions may differ depending on the stage of the programme (progression or award).

Academic Regulations

This year, Examination Boards will need to apply the relevant set of Academic regulations to students as below:

Undergraduate Students:

Undergraduate Students who commenced their studies in 2019/20 will be considered under the Single Set of Academic Regulations.
All other continuing undergraduate Students will be considered by the previous regulations:


MBBS Students who commenced their Studies before 2019/20


Postgraduate Students:

Postgraduate students who are on programmes which have been through curriculum review are to be considered under the Single Set of Academic Regulations. A full list of these programmes can be found on the academic regulations webpages.


All students on other postgraduate taught programmes will be considered under the following regulations:


Mitigating Circumstances– Impact of Covid-19

The College updated the guidance to Mitigation Boards and then reviewed that to take account of the changing circumstances that students were facing in response to the pandemic. The advice was further updated for the 2020-21 academic year as part of the Fair Assessment arrangements.

Regardless of the reason for any claim for mitigation, Boards of Examiners are required to follow the regulations with regards to any specific actions that they take in respect of the claim, such as offering a deferral, uncap of a late submission etc.

Continuing Advice for the application of Mitigating Circumstances decisions.
Board of Examiners will need to consider students that may have been granted Mitigating Circumstances under the previous policy and/or under the updated procedure, which was introduced in October 2018. This is likely to be those Boards considering a student in their third or subsequent year of their programme but may relate to students that have repeated a year of study. This guidance is provided to support members of Boards in their decision-making process.

Examinations Boards will need to consider the recommendations made from Mitigating Circumstances Boards for accepted claims in accordance with paragraph 8.6 of the Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedure, as follows.

1) **Defer:** Where the student has failed the assessment(s), the Board of Examiners can consider offering the student:
   a) a further opportunity to attempt the assessment(s) at the next available assessment point. If relating to a first attempt at the assessment this will receive an uncapped mark.
   b) to take an uncapped Supplementary Qualifying Test(s) (SQT, Faculty of Engineering only) to retrieve outstanding modules
   c) to be permitted to take an SQT(s) (Faculty of Engineering only) to enable progression
   d) to be offered an opportunity to retake the year as a first attempt

   Where the assessment(s) has/have been passed or the module overall is a pass, and therefore a) to d) are not applicable, the Board of Examiners may consider:
   e) extended consideration at the borderline for an uplift in classification in accordance with the regulations
   f) consideration at the borderline where a qualifying mark is required for continued progression

Whilst the above options would normally be sufficient the Mitigating Circumstances Board may make a recommendation in the light of the information that it holds for a particular action. However, it is ultimately the decision of the Board of Examiners in the knowledge that the student has an accepted claim for mitigation to consider the appropriate ‘mitigation’ to be offered, subject to the regulations and any programmes specific requirements.

2) **Allow Late.** Where the claim was submitted to mitigate for the late submission of a piece of assessment, (either coursework or a timed remote assessment) it would now be accepted as though ‘on time’ and receive an uncapped mark.

**What can’t a Board do?**

Boards cannot increase the marks or overall weighted average of a student on the basis of accepted claim for mitigating circumstances. The transcript must show the marks and credits as actually achieved.
Percentage marks can only be increased where following the moderation of work upward scaling had been found to be necessary, or part of an assessment had to be excluded and as such the percentage mark for the work increases. Where this has occurred, it should be reported to the Board.

**Covid-19 - Fair Assessment**

For Undergraduate Programmes of Study, a College wide Safety-Net Policy was agreed for 2019-20. The safety net augmented, where possible and appropriate, practices already approved for special situations in our regulations. These will still apply in 2020-21 under the approach to Fair Assessment

Boards of Examiners will need to satisfy themselves that the following practices have been adhered to:

- The processes and methods for marking assessments have been conducted in the normal way.

- That students have satisfied the usual requirements for progression or award, i.e. a student must pass modules as specified for their programme for the safety net to be considered.

- Students who do not meet these requirements will retain the right to resit opportunities, as set out in the regulations.

Under the 2020-21 Approach to Fair Assessment, the following applies:

- **Treatment of Year One**
  - On classification, calculate with and without year 1 as in 2019/20
  - The final degree classification will be determined by the better outcome of: zero weighting or 7.5 percent weighting of year 1 (with exception for MBBS and iBScs, which are to be managed locally).

- **Resits**
  - In-year resits for all years and levels (UG and PGT), with option for students to resit either in-year or during the following year.
  - No fees for in-year resits.

- **Cohort analysis**

In the College’s 2021 commitment to the maintenance of fair assessment the following statement has been made:

*The College will ensure your cohort’s overall performance is not impacted in comparison to previous years. We will implement a process of cohort analysis to ensure that overall year (or element) weighted averages are consistent with the performance of equivalent cohorts in the past. Our normal marking and moderation processes will continue to be applied at module and/or assessment level by each Board of Examiners. This is no different to any other year.*

*In addition, for this academic year, if the proportion of students in a cohort achieving 70% or more for their year (or element) weighted average is less than the proportion in the past then Boards of Examiners will make specific adjustments to ensure that the proportion achieving 70% or more this year is at least equal to the historic proportion.*

*Our normal comparisons will be to the performance of equivalent cohorts in immediate pre-pandemic academic years. The additional process which looks at the proportion of students achieving 70% or more*
this year applies to all taught students for the 2020/21 academic year except: 1st year undergraduates, MBBS students, and students studying programmes where either the current cohort is small or limited historic data to compare to is available. Normal marking and moderation process will still apply to this group.

This note is a non-technical summary of the more detailed guidance for Boards of Examiners. In summary: where the appropriate historical data exists, Boards of Examiners should make appropriate adjustments to ensure that the proportion of students achieving 70% or more in 2020/21 should not be less than the mean proportion achieving 70% or more for the three cohorts 2018/19, 2017/18 and 2016/17.

The six steps outlined in the detailed guidance can be summarised as:

1. The normal marking and moderation processes are applied at module or assessment level as per the standard arrangements for the programme/department.

2. The normal initial year/element weighted averages for each student who has passed the year of study are calculated. If a student has failed modules/assessments such that they cannot pass the year of study then they should be considered through the normal processes for such cases – the cohort analysis process only applies to students who have passed the year.

3. A decision must be made as to what programme(s) and/or years of study will be used for comparison (e.g. UG year 2, separating the BSc from MSci cohort, or group of MSc programmes).

4. Identify if the proportion of students achieving 70% or more in the 2020/21 cohort is less than the mean proportion of the equivalent cohort achieving 70% or more for the three academic years 2018/19, 2017/18 and 2016/17. [If yes, go to step 5; if no go to step 6]

5. If the results of the cohort for 2020/21 are below the mean proportion of the equivalent cohort for the three academic years 2018/19, 2017/18 and 2016/17, the Board of Examiners must make adjustments to ensure they are not. Mark adjustments and/or scaling should be applied at either assessment or module level. The exact process for mark adjustment or scaling is to be determined by the relevant Boards of Examiners.

6. The normal processes should then continue. The Board of Examiners must make classification decisions for graduating students (including consideration of students at the borderline). Module and year marks, progression outcomes and classification decisions must be reported to the Registry. All decisions/actions taken must be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners meetings, to aid in the handling of any complaints and appeals

Advice for Consideration at the Borderline

The College regulations permit consideration of borderline candidates for an uplift in classification. Undergraduate Students graduating this year will still be considered under the continuing student regulations.

It is important to ensure that the official minutes of the Board of Examiners meeting detail any discussions, particularly with regard to exceptional circumstances where decisions outside the ‘norms’ are made.

These minutes are necessary to ensure:

- The College is able to review individual exceptional decisions to ensure that they are made in a clear and rationale way, with due consideration of all factors.
An accurate record of the decision is available in the event of an appeal, complaint to
the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education or through civil action.
Informed advice or guidance is available to students of the deliberation of the Board,
if requested
The College can identify trends and take action as needed.

The requirement to record the decisions does not necessarily mean that each decision will
need significant detail. For example, where there is a clear algorithm to consider students in
the borderline zone for an uplift in classification (where there is no mitigation to consider) this
can simply state that

candidate X was considered in the classification borderline and the decision
was to uplift/not uplift as the criteria was met/ not met due to…

Where a student has an approved claim for mitigating circumstances, which have not been
taken into consideration already because they passed the module at the first attempt, the
Board may extend the normal borderline percentage in line with the College and any
programme specific regulation. Care should be taken to ensure that the mitigation is taken
into account fully, without double counting or providing an undue advantage to the student.
When designing any form of algorithm for consideration at borderline, the Board should
carefully consider how the design can or should be adapted in cases of approved mitigation,
so as to avoid putting in place impossible requirements or to “double count” mitigation.

Boards are reminded that appeals made on the basis of mitigating circumstances are dealt
with as late mitigating circumstances claims by Boards, rather than as appeals via Registry.

**Academic Misconduct**

The previous *Cheating Offences Policy* was replaced with the [Academic Misconduct
procedures](#) from September 2018. The changes to the updated procedures mainly relate to
the processing of allegations and the consideration of sanctions in relation to allegations of
academic misconduct.

Minor, first time cases of plagiarism continue to be considered by the Chair of the Board
and must be reported to the Board of Examiners. All other cases will be managed by the
Student Casework team in Registry. Where this relates to an examination offence that
could be considered to be technical in nature, with the agreement of Chair of the Board, the
case may be referred back to be considered in the “minor” process and reported to the
Board. The outcomes of cases managed by the Student Casework team will be reported
back to the Board and should be reported and formally recorded at the Board.

**Potential sanctions in the Academic misconduct process**

The potential sanctions are as follows. (N.B. all penalties from b-g include a formal
reprimand):

a) Informal reprimand but no further action is required
b) Assessment is marked on its merits
c) Assessment is awarded zero, with re-submission for an uncapped mark
d) Assessment is awarded zero, with re-submission capped at the pass mark.
e) Module is awarded zero, with the re-submission as required by the Board of Examiners, capped at the pass mark.

f) Module is awarded zero, with resubmission required. The mark for resubmission of the module will be zero, though credit will be awarded should it be of a pass standard.

g) Zero is recorded for the performance of the candidate in all assessments they sat in the academic year the offence occurred and where eligible, that the candidate not be permitted to retake all the assessments until the next academic year. The retake marks will be capped at the pass mark.

h) Zero is recorded for the module, no retake opportunities will be given and no award of the institution will be given (expulsion).

i) Zero is recorded for candidate in all assessments. No award will be given and no credits will be recorded for the student (expulsion).

Where an award has already been made:

j) Award zero for module/assessment undertaken (where appropriate withdraw credit), rescind the award of a degree/diploma/certificate of the College, but retain any other credits awarded (where appropriate).

k) Award zero for all assessment (and credit where appropriate) and rescind the award of a degree/diploma/certificate of the College

When the panel considers a proven case of academic misconduct, they do not have the full details of the student’s programme of study, such as year marks, previous repeated assessment or programme specific regulations. Therefore, there may be occasions in which the given penalty would have an undue impact on the student, such as preventing course completion where this was not intended. This is most likely with penalty ‘F’, if the remainder of the student’s profile means that they fail to achieve a minimum overall percentage mark for completion of the stage or final classification. The intention of the penalty is to reduce the final overall weighted average of the student and potentially lowering the classification. It is not intended to be a de facto expulsion. The Board should therefore take this into account and modify the penalty accordingly. Any modifications must be clearly identified, the reasoning and actions recording in the minutes of the Board of Examiners and provided to the Student Casework team for the official record of the offence.

Ongoing Impact of Curriculum Review

Due to the introduction of new or revised curricula from 2019/20 following the Curriculum Review process, Boards of Examiners need to continue to consider the wider implications of any decision to require a student to undertake a retake. Clear guidance will need to be provided to students who may need to transfer over to the new curricula either as a result of going straight to retake year under the new curricula or following unsuccessful resits.

Guidance with regards to referral limits and compensation under the Single Set of Taught Academic Regulations

The attached flowcharts providing supporting guidance to consider students that have completed their first year under the Single Set of Taught Academic Regulations. Additional support can be requested from the Quality Assurance team. Please email quality@imperial.ac.uk in the first instance.