

The Conduct of Master's Level (MSc, MRes, MBA, MEd, MPH, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate) Boards of Examiners' Meetings

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document provides guidance on the purpose and conduct of Master's Level (MSc, MRes, MBA, MEd, MPH, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate) Boards of Examiners' meetings¹ and should be read in conjunction with the following:

[Regulations for the Examination of Taught Master's, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate Programmes](#)

[Mitigating Circumstances: Policy and Procedures](#)

[Academic Misconduct Procedures](#)

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), with specific reference to the advice and guidance on [Assessment](#) and [External Expertise](#)

- 1.2. A Board of Examiners is appointed annually for each programme in accordance with the College's Examination Regulations. There may be internal sub-board meetings but there will only be one meeting of each Board where awards are confirmed. Henceforth this is known as the Final Board of Examiners' Meeting (FBEM).
- 1.3. External examiners are appointed to all Boards (including Re-sit Boards where necessary) in accordance with the relevant Examination Regulations. External examiners will not normally attend sub-board meetings, but should always attend the Final Board of Examiners' Meeting (FBEM).
- 1.4. **Sub-board meetings of the Board of Examiners**
- 1.4.1. A sub-board(s) (see section 3.2) of the Board of Examiners should meet in advance of the FBEM meeting to determine the overall module/component/element marks and agree any scaling or adjustments. Approved procedures for dealing with borderline candidates (e.g. vivas and/or algorithms) must also be held before the FBEM meeting and may result in further sub-board meetings prior to the final FBEM meeting.
- 1.4.2. For Master's Level programmes which share modules with BSc/MSci or BEng/MEng programmes, the Board of Examiners for the BSc/MSci or

¹ The UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance for Assessment states:

Degree-awarding bodies operate, or oversee the operation of, examination boards (or equivalent bodies) to make judgements and decisions on which the award of credit and qualifications is ultimately based. The powers, authority and accountability of the board are clearly specified and understood by members of the board.

BEng/MEng programme may agree the marks for the Master's Level candidates for these modules provided that one Master's level external examiner is in attendance.

1.5. Final Board of Examiners' Meetings (FBEM)

- 1.5.1. The Board of Examiners will agree the awards of Master's level candidates at the FBEM (see section 3.1) and, where appropriate, will confirm whether or not continuing part-time students can progress to the next academic year. The Board will also confirm re-sit opportunities for candidates at this meeting.
- 1.5.2. The FBEM meeting is normally anonymous to ensure parity of treatment for all candidates. However, as the small size, involvement of external examiners the viva voce examinations and/or the identifying nature of each candidate's individual project can make it impractical to ensure anonymity for Master's level candidates, programmes can seek permission from the relevant Faculty Education Committee for Final Boards not to be anonymous. The College recommends anonymity is practiced where this is reasonable and practical. The procedure and form for requesting a dispensation from the anonymity requirement can be found on the [Academic Policy](#) section of the website [located under *Exam Boards for Taught Programmes*].
- 1.5.3. However, to ensure parity of treatment for all candidates across the College, it has been agreed that mitigating circumstances will be considered outside the FBEM (see Section 6).

2. Notification of Board Meetings

- 2.1. It is recommended that departments² confirm the dates of their Board meetings a year in advance, in particular the date of FBEM meetings which external examiners are required to attend. Departments should inform Registry when a Board is going to take place³.

3. Composition of Boards of Examiners' Meetings

Final Examiners' Board of Examiners' Meetings (FBEM)

[Full details of the roles and responsibilities of each of the groups described below can be accessed by clicking on the relevant hyperlink below or by visiting the College's [Roles and Responsibilities webpage](#).]

- 3.1. The following people should attend FBEM meetings.

- [Chair of the Board of Examiners](#).

² or Divisions, Schools, Centres and Institutes

³ Due to the number of Master's programmes in the College a representative from Registry will not be able to attend every year. Registry aims to ensure that a representative will attend about every three years but will aim to provide a representative out of sequence if invited. In their first year, the Registry will also aim to attend the FBEM of new programmes.

- [External examiners.](#)
All external examiners are required to attend⁴ the Final meeting of the Board except in cases of illness or other unavoidable [emergency] causes. Where an external examiner is unable to attend the meeting they should be consulted by telephone or email to confirm the results of students. If, because of the reasons stated above, no external examiner can attend the FBEM meeting, the Academic Registrar should be informed. The FBEM meeting cannot proceed without an external examiner unless this is authorised by the Academic Registrar or nominee.
- [College examiners](#)
Normally all academic staff involved in substantive teaching on a Master's programme are appointed as College examiners by the Chair of the Board and are thus expected to attend the final meeting of the Board of Examiners unless granted dispensation by the Head of Department.
- Members of academic staff who have acted as [Assessors](#) by contributing to a small number of short questions or [Assistant Examiners](#) by assisting with the marking of scripts are not entitled to attend unless invited to by the Chair of the Boards of Examiners.
- At least one member of the relevant Mitigating Circumstances Board, if used, should attend the meeting (see Section 6).
- Key members of departmental administrative staff associated with assessment (e.g. Examinations Officer, Programme Administrator).
- A representative from Registry

3.1.1. Normally a minimum of 60% of the membership of the board should be present for valid decisions to be taken (see 15.1 [Regulations for the Examination of Taught Master's, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate Programmes](#))

3.2. **Sub-Board Meetings of the Board of Examiners**

3.2.1. The Board Chair and normally all academic staff appointed as College examiners for the modules/components/elements under review should attend sub-meetings of the Board of Examiners as well as any other key members of departmental administrative staff involved with assessment. If used, a member of the Mitigating Circumstances Board should also be in attendance.

4. **Joint Board of Examiners' Meetings (for Master's level programmes which cross Faculties and/or Departments)**

4.1. A Joint Board will normally be set up only for candidates whose range of examinations has, in the opinion of the relevant Faculty Education Committee, been too wide for a single Board to deal with adequately.

⁴ This should normally be in person but arrangements can be made to do this via video-conferencing if necessary

4.2. Any final meeting of a Joint Board must be attended by:

- Chair of the Board of Examiners.
- At least one external examiner appointed to the joint programme and, normally, at least one external examiner in each of the principal fields of study concerned.
- College examiners from each of the Examination Boards of the principal fields of study concerned.
- If used, a member of the Mitigating Circumstances Board should also be in attendance.
- Key members of departmental administrative staff involved with assessment (e.g. Examinations Officer, Programme Administrator).
- A representative from Registry.

5. Board of Examiners' Meetings for Collaborative Programmes

5.1. Where programmes are run in collaboration with a partner institution there must be appropriate representation at the FBEM meetings (and sub-board meetings where relevant) by the partner and the College. The composition of these Boards should be approved by the relevant Faculty Education Committee and be detailed in the governing Memorandum of Agreement.

6. Consideration of Mitigating Circumstances

6.1. The Mitigating Circumstances Board (MCB) considers claims for mitigating circumstances affecting students' module/component/element results in line with the College Mitigating Circumstances Procedure. By its nature the MCB cannot be anonymous however candidate numbers only must be used when recording and passing on decisions for individual candidates.

6.2. The Board will accept or reject a claim in line with the policy document and may provide recommendations to the Board of Examiners for action, based on the claim itself. The Board of Examiners will make any final decisions of mitigation to be taken in the light of the mitigating circumstances policy, examination regulations, the student's academic profile and any specific programme requirements.

6.3. The decisions of the Board of Examiners in relation to mitigating circumstances must be clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

6.4. For further details of the MCB see [Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedures](#) and the [Implementation guide for mitigating circumstances procedure](#).

7. Conduct and Process

- 7.1. All Boards should ensure that any decisions they make are transparent and recorded accurately in the minutes of the meeting⁵. There should be transparent processes for dealing with anomalies in marking and arrangements for fair and appropriate adjustments. FEBM minutes should be sent to the Registry's QA Team (external.examiner@imperial.ac.uk) for logging.
- 7.2. Unless previously agreed by the relevant Faculty Education Committee, candidates should be represented by their candidate number only at the FBEM.
- 7.3. The FBEM receive the final marks from the sub-board(s)⁶, plus any recommendations relating to the consideration of mitigation or borderline cases, for each candidate for ratification and confirm the award (or progression in the case of continuing part-time students). The FBEM must report marks to Registry to a maximum of two decimal places.
- 7.4. Re-sit requirements are agreed.
- 7.5. Reasons for either accepting or not accepting the recommendations regarding mitigating circumstances or the outcome of borderline processes must be recorded in the minutes. If there have been no instances of mitigating circumstances or any borderline cases this should also be recorded in the minutes.
- 7.6. A summary of action taken by the Board during the academic year under the [College's Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#) [located under *Academic Integrity*]. If there have been no minor cheating offences this should also be recorded.
- 7.7. A report on the total number of cases of late submission of assessed work should be presented and the number of occasions in which the default penalty was applied or amended.
- 7.8. Decisions regarding special awards and prizes should be recorded.
- 7.9. An overview of results and management information set data should be presented together with comments from the Director of Postgraduate Studies.
- 7.10. A brief summary of what action (if any) was taken as a result of the external examiners' reports from the previous year.
- 7.11. General preliminary comments made by the external examiners on the outcome of assessments for the current academic session and their

⁵ The UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Assessment states:

A record is kept of decisions and of the factors taken into account in the exercise of discretion by the board. Regulations make explicit how applications from students with extenuating circumstances are dealt with, including whether or not new assessment attempts are allowed and assessment elements disregarded.

⁶ including, if applicable, the final marks from the Examiners' Progression and Award Board (EPAB) for BSc/MSci or BEng/MEng programmes which share modules with the Master's Level programme

reflections on the assessment process and standards achieved should be recorded.

- 7.12. Clear provision must be made to enable potential conflicts of interest - such as personal interests or involvements with students - to be identified and addressed.
- 7.13. Potential changes to the examination arrangements and procedures, marking scheme and/or assessment formats for future cohorts should be discussed. A recommendation for any modifications should then be made to the appropriate committee.

8. Borderline Candidates

- 8.1. Departments should develop objective and transparent processes for dealing with borderline cases. These may, for example, include vivas and/or formulaic algorithms for determining whether a candidate's mark may be raised; for example the number of questions answered at a specific level (i.e. grade profiling). The methods to be used (including details of any algorithm) should be submitted to the relevant Faculty Education Committee for prior approval.
- 8.2. Programmes using viva voce examinations to deal with borderline cases should refer to the College's [Conduct of Oral Assessments \(including viva voce examinations\) for Undergraduate and Master's Level Programmes](#).
- 8.3. The examiners who conducted a student's viva voce examination will provide the Board at its FBEM meeting with a recommendation regarding the additional marks to be awarded. The FBEM will consider the recommendation and make a final decision but should not discuss the detail of the viva.
- 8.4. All Boards should keep full and accurate minutes of their reasons for moving a candidate up a grade or their reasons for not. If appropriate, it is recommended that pre-meetings are held to discuss any difficult cases prior to the final meeting of the Board.
- 8.5. The outcome of decisions made by Boards of Examiners must be communicated to students as quickly as possible, it is therefore essential that results are sent to Registry very soon after the Board of Examiners meeting so that the final official result can be issued.

9. Academic Misconduct Offences

- 9.1. Details of minor examination offences, such as plagiarism, that have been dealt with by the department should also be reported to the Board at the FBEM meeting (and sub-boards as appropriate) and minuted. If there have been no instances of minor misconduct offences this should also be recorded.

10. External Examiners' Reports

- 10.1. External examiners would normally be asked to provide general comments on the outcome of assessments for the academic session and their reflections on the examination process and standards achieved at the FBEM meeting. This

feedback is in addition to, and does not replace, the formal report that each external examiner is asked to submit to the College.

11. Award Data – Discussion at Boards

- 11.1. At the end of the Board meeting, members should consider management information set data for individual modules and for the awards overall. Boards should review and consider trends in the distribution of the award of the number of pass, merits and distinctions as well as failure rates. Boards should also review year trends, including 3 year averages for the marks awarded on the different taught components of the degree programme and for examinations to ensure that parts of the programme are not consistently significantly different in marks awarded. This would exclude coursework only components such as projects, as these differ for explainable reasons. The management information set should be accompanied by comments from the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

12. Re-sit Boards

- 12.1. These Boards consider results of re-sits and any deferred examinations. Re-sit Boards may take place electronically, however if this is the case, at least one external examiner will be consulted.

[Sub- or Final] Board of Examiners' Meeting – Master's Level Programme(s)

Faculty(ies) of [insert name]:

Department(s) of [insert name]:

Name of Programme(s):

Minutes for the meeting held on [insert date] at [insert time] in [insert room], [insert campus].

1. College Staff Present
2. External Examiner(s) present
3. Apologies for absence
4. Declaration of conflicts of interest (if any)
5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on [insert date] and Matters Arising from these
6. Report on Chair's Actions
7. Consideration of examination results and confirmation of progression (for part-time students) and award made to individual candidates, including:
 - Consideration of recommendations for additional marks awarded to borderline cases. Reasons why candidates at class borderlines were promoted or not promoted must be recorded. If there were no instances of borderlines this should be recorded.
 - Consideration of recommendations by the Mitigation Advisory Panel concerning students who have submitted mitigating circumstances. Reasons for the outcomes of the recommendations must be recorded. If there have been no instances of mitigating circumstances this should be recorded.
8. Re-sit arrangements are agreed.
9. Summary of action taken by the Board during the academic year under the College's [Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures](#) [located under *Academic Integrity*]. (If there have been no minor cheating offences this should also be recorded).

- 10. A report of the total number of cases of late submission of assessed work should be presented and the number of occasions in which the penalty was applied or amended.**
- 11. Decisions made regarding special awards and prizes.**
- 12. Consider the overview of results and management information set data and comments from the Director of Postgraduate Studies on these.**
- 13. A brief summary report of what action (if any) was taken as a result of the external examiners' reports from the previous year**
- 14. General preliminary comments made by the external examiners on the outcome of assessments for the current academic session and their reflections on the examination process and standards achieved.**
- 15. Confirmation that the marks for the current session are endorsed by external examiners.**
- 16. Consideration of examination arrangements and procedures, amendments to marking schemes/assessment formats for future cohorts.**
- 17. Any Other Business**
- 18. Date, time and place of next meeting**

[After the FBEM please send a copy of the minutes to the Registry's Quality Assurance Team – external.examiner@imperial.ac.uk for logging]

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Notes and latest changes:	<p>Formatting changes made on 10 March 2016</p> <p>General updates made June 2017</p> <p>June 2019 – updating of links; updating of section on mitigating circumstances in line with new MC policy; updating of section on alternative ways for external examiners to engage with the Board if they are unable to be present at the Board meeting</p>		