

Guidelines on the Conduct of Reconvened Exam Boards

Staff who need to reconvene an Exam Board often find reconvened exam boards can be held virtually, usually via email, rather than having to convene a physical meeting. The following guidelines have been produced to assist staff.

There are a number of instances where students' results are being processed outside the normal exam board period, for example:

- For PGT students who have been given an extension to submit their dissertation and therefore miss the final board;
- For PGT students who have been required by the final board to resubmit their dissertation;
- For UG final year students who have been required to resubmit their project by a deadline beyond the September resit board;
- Where boards are reconvened to consider appeals which have been upheld by the Appeals Officer;
- Where boards are reconvened to consider changes to marks where errors have come to light after an exam board has taken place;
- Where results are now available for students who had been made 'Wait' at the original exam board due to the investigation of an academic offence;
- Where a meeting is needed for extraordinary or ad hoc cases.

What do we mean by a 'virtual exam board'?

Across the University we are probably using this term to mean different things. For example, in some departments the use of Skype or video conferencing is routinely used in the conduct of the exam board to save members having to travel to the meeting, thus meaning there is a virtual element to the meeting. Kaplan exam boards are held in a virtual environment where members are logged on to a system which enables them to participate in a meeting in real-time from their own offices.

However, for the purpose of these guidelines we will use 'virtual' to mean the sort of meetings where the business is conducted via email. The exam board is still a formal board, but it does not meet physically to consider students results.

When might it be appropriate to hold a virtual reconvened exam board?

If there is going to be a long gap between reassessment being marked and the next scheduled exam board, departments may wish to hold a virtual exam board so students can get their results quickly. This will be helpful if they are trying to get into the labour market, applying for further study, or need a speedy decision in light of visa issues. If students are eligible for an award it can then be conferred upon them immediately and they will then be invited to the next graduation ceremony.

Exam boards to consider appeals must be reconvened as soon as possible.

If the case is going to be particularly complicated or there are going to be complex recommendations in relation to extenuating circumstances, then it might not be appropriate to hold a virtual board and arrangements should be made for the board to meet at a time when members can be present.

How is a virtual exam board convened?

Departments are responsible for convening a virtual exam board in consultation with the Assessment Team. Where possible it should have the same membership as the original board. Where members are no longer available and the board would be inquorate without them, alternative members can be approved by the relevant Deputy Dean (Education).

The department must warn members in advance that they will be required to take part in a virtual board and say when the documentation is likely to be sent out. Members should be told that non-responses by the deadline will be taken as agreement to the proposal made by the chair. A reasonable period of time should be set for a deadline for responses to be given to the secretary.

Does the External Examiner need to be involved?

External Examiners should be included where they were members of the original Exam Board.

Additional guidance for virtual exam boards which are reconvened to consider appeals

In the case of a reconvened exam board to consider an appeal, the Appeals Procedures state that the Appeals Officer also has the right 'to attend and address the meeting of the board'. It is rare for an Appeals Officer to attend a meeting, but the Appeals Officer would indicate if s/he wished to be involved in the virtual board.

The Appeals Procedures also state that, 'In causing a Board of Examiners to reconvene, the Dean/Chair may, at his or her discretion, consult by telephone or in writing any internal or external examiner who is unable to attend the reconvened meeting of the Board.' It would therefore still be an option for the Chair to contact a member by these methods if necessary.

Voting and contentious cases

It is helpful to ask the Chair to propose a recommendation for the members to consider before the documentation is sent to the rest of the members. This can make the process run more smoothly.

If there is not unanimous support for the Chair's proposal then the Chair can take vote as normal. However, if there is considerable disagreement over a student's result, the Chair will need to make a judgement about whether to halt the virtual board and ask for a board to be convened physically.

Extenuating Circumstances

In the case of students whose work is being reassessed, (e.g where PGT students are resubmitting a dissertation) it would be sensible for the department to let the students know that their case will be considered by a virtual exam board and give them a deadline for submitting any extenuating circumstances which affect the work they have just undertaken. It is not necessary to do this where a board is being reconvened to consider an error or late marks since the normal extenuating circumstances deadline would still apply. Neither is it necessary for appeals since the student has already submitted their case.

What documentation/information is required by the board?

- An explanation of why the case is being considered, and if possible a recommendation from the Chair;
- An anonymous grid showing the new marks;
- A recommendation in relation to any new extenuating circumstances which have been submitted by the student or which are being carried forward from a previous board;
- In the case of a reconvened board to consider an appeal, the following items are also included:
 - The student's appeal;
 - The Appeal Officer's comments;
 - Any material relevant to the original assessment.

Where the volume of documentation is extensive and might cause a problem for mailboxes, staff should investigate the use of the 'Essex Zendto' service to create a drop file. Members will then be sent an email providing them with the necessary information to allow them to log on and pick up the file. However, members will only have 8 days to pick-up the files and after this time the files are purged. This does not mean that the deadline for a decision has to be set within 8 days just the

deadline for staff to pick up the information. Details about Zendto can be found at <https://zendto.essex.ac.uk/>

Access to the Results Processing System (RPS) for producing grids

Depending on the time of year, the student may not be loaded onto RPS, so please contact Carla Constable in Systems Administration to see whether it will be possible to use RPS to produce the grid in cases where new marks need to be processed.

If a student's result has already been backloaded, never produce a grid from the live system or the marks will automatically show to the student before they have been approved. You must ask for a grid to be printed from the Test system.

If you need to produce a manual grid, Carla can provide you with a template spreadsheet to help you calculate year marks.

If you are sending the grid electronically, then it is possible to print a PDF version of the grid from RPS. Make sure you click on 'anonymous' when you open the grid. When you have opened the individual grid, click print and look for the option to print to PDF Creator. This will allow you to create a PDF document which you can save to your computer. If you do not have PDF Creator on your machine you could contact the Helpdesk for more information about how to load it.

Anonymisation

Cases should be considered anonymously. In the case of appeals, please ensure you remove the name from the report from the Appeals Officer and any supporting documentation.

Keeping the material confidential

The email should be marked as confidential, and members should be told to delete the paperwork from their machines once the exam board work has been concluded.

Communicating the decision of the exam board

Once the board has confirmed the overall outcome, the secretary then produces a pass list. This should then be sent to the Assessment Team via examboards@essex.ac.uk for action as soon as possible. The Assessment Team will then get the database updated and send out the award or outcome letter to the student.

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