UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Academic Division
Board of Examinations

minutes

A meeting of the Board of Examinations was held on Tuesday 1 December 2015 in the Syndicate Room in the Old Schools.

Present: Professor G Virgo (Chair); Mr R Cashman; Mr D Goode; Dr M Jones; Dr J Keeler; Mr T Milner; Dr C Ristuccia; Dr E Silva; Mr D Taplin; Mrs C Fage (Secretary); Mrs J Green (In attendance)

Apologies: Mr G Chesterman; Dr D Good; Dr R Thornton

Declarations of interest

No interests were declared.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2015 had been circulated and were approved.

2. Starred items

The Board agreed to unstar the business to which Minutes 3 and 6.1 relates – 'Toilet breaks on examination sites' and 'Payment rates for casual staff 2015/16' but to otherwise approve the starred items.

3. Matters arising

It was confirmed that the issue of the 15-minute break between examinations for the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Tripos examinations would allow candidates to use the toilets and examination conditions would not apply during this period.

4. Chair's Report

The Chair reported that the issue of corrections to Mathematics examination question papers had been discussed with the Faculty via the officers of the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC) and a response would be reported to GBEC at its next meeting

Officers of GBEC are in correspondence with a faculty named to the Board of Examinations following concerns raised via the Secretary's report in September 2015, regarding the approval of examination arrangements outside of the formal process.

The Examination Review is ongoing and in Lent term the working group will review responses to an open consultation held during Michaelmas term. The Chair reported positive interaction with Heads of Departments on discussions of student workload and the examination review and significant points were made which would be taken forward.

5. Principal items of business

5.1 Examination Space

A discussion paper reporting on the issue of examination space across the university estate had been circulated (**BE151602**) to which the Secretary spoke. The purpose of the paper was to review usage and suitability of existing space, whilst forward planning for known loss of space.

The paper:

(a) Reflected on examination space in 2014-15 and projected space requirements for examinations in 2015-16, highlighting increase in costs;

(b) Summarised losses and gains in the short term (up to 2018) and long term;

(c) Expressed concerns about the inability to access some internal space and to determine the viability of space;

(d) Suggested that, with redevelopment plans across the estate, examination space would shrink and consequently, new permanent space should be identified and secured.

The Board was asked to consider the following recommendations:

a) To ask the General Board's Education Committee to recommend to the General Board that Faculties and Departments should release all suitable space across the university estate for examinations, working with the Schools and with Estate Management to identify such space;

b) To ask the Bursars' Committee to identify any suitable College space that could be considered for examinations and advise on costs;

c) That the Board consider what is provided centrally for students requiring IT provision in examinations for the Easter term 2018, given that the Titan Suite will no longer be available and the Student Services Centre will not yet be open;

d) That, as an alternative to a formal strategy, the Board reviews provision biannually to ensure that new developments, and any changes to existing development timelines, are monitored.

The Board agreed to all the recommendations without change, except recommendation (d) that was changed to annual rather than biannual.

5.2 Statement on reasons for permitting early / late sitting of an examination

A draft statement had been prepared by the Secretary and circulated (**BE151603**).

The Board welcomed the statement and agreed that Officers should inform Senior Tutors and post online.

5.3 <u>Illegible scripts</u>

The Board received the policy and guidance on illegible scripts as paper **BE151604,** which was last reviewed in March 2015, and discussed what penalties should be imposed for illegible scripts to ensure that no candidates were disadvantaged and in what timeframe the proposals should be implemented. The CUSU representative felt that the current system should be maintained until the outcome of the Examination review was known.

The Board agreed to recommend to GBEC that, for 2015-16, discretion remain with Examiners to allow transcription of a script. However, for borderline cases only, where an External Examiner is considering a candidate's complete run of scripts the transcribed script is not eligible to be considered as part of any case that might be made for raising a candidate to a higher class. This is in order to ensure that the transcribed script does not confer any advantage on the candidate. The rubric would remain on the examination papers.
From 2016-17, the Board determined that transcription should not be allowed.

5.4 <u>Missing students</u>

Paper **BE151605** presented the need for a policy on the reporting of missing students from an examination venue. The present arrangements for dealing with missing students was felt to introduce both unfairness and complaints, and that the clear responsibility for attending examinations on time lay, and should be seen to lie, with the individual student and not the Board or the College.

The Board agreed to recommend to GBEC the following;

a) That there should be no obligation on the Examinations Office to inform Colleges of students missing in order for Colleges to get the student to the venue, but that the Examinations Office would inform the Colleges of missing students at some point during the period of the examination so that the College was aware that the student had not attended the examination venue;

b) That a student might enter the examination venue up to 30-minutes from the start of the examination to take the examination paper and would receive no extra time;

c) That where a student would not be able to reach the venue within the first 30-minutes of the examination starting, the College could seek permission from the Secretary of the Board of Examinations, for their student to sit the examination in College. The Secretary would determine if any time penalty might apply.

Reasons to allow might include:

- **where a student left for the examination venue in good time and attempted to reach the venue but was delayed for reasons outside of his or her control (e.g. accident, traffic incident);**
- **illness that requires student to be kept in isolation.**

Reasons not to allow might include:

- **overslept;**
- **misread the start time or venue of the examination.**

The Board also recommended developing electronic means to record entry of each student to the examination venue, which could also inform Colleges of missing students.

5.5 <u>Alternative IT provision for examinations</u>

The Secretary spoke to an issue raised recently whereby students had requested, as part of their examination access arrangements, to use their own hardware (laptops and tablets) rather than that provided by the College or centrally. This was a specific issue for those students whose own hardware was a MAC and there was only PC provision available in college or in a central venue. The concerns raised included the inability to isolate a student's activity to typing only on their own machine.

The Board agreed that, if the examination arrangement was for typing only, then students should not use their own hardware and arrangements should be made for them to use the college or centrally provided hardware. Where a student's access arrangement included the requirement for specialist assistive technology, which is already available on their own hardware, and is not available on college or centrally provided hardware, then they would be allowed to use their own hardware subject to the student signing appropriate documentation supplied by the Secretary, and with individual or small group invigilation.

5.6 <u>UIS Service document</u>

The Secretary reported that a draft service-agreement document had been received but is not ready for distribution and would be circulated outside of the meeting.

The Secretary reported that there would no longer be a cost for hiring the Titan Suite, although the costs of hiring temporary staff to provide support would remain.

5.7 <u>Membership of the Board of Examinations</u>

The Chair thanked Dr Jones, Dr Keeler and Mr Milner for their contributions to the Board.

6. <u>Other Business</u>

6.1 <u>Payment rates for casual staff 2015/16</u>

The Board received the proposed rates for 2015/16 as paper **BE151606**. Concern was raised regarding the ongoing issue of recruitment and retention of suitable casual staff.

The Board agreed that, subject to the confirmation that the attendant rate is above the living wage, the proposed rates for 2015/16 should be approved. Further, it requested:

a) Modelling on creating a set of rates similar to the university single salary spine, which may encourage retention;

b) Analysis of other local institution payment rates for comparison.

6.2 Report on the Examination-related Support available to Students at the UCS

The Board received the report circulated as **BE151608.**

6.3 Extract from Student Complaints and Appeals Section: Annual Report for the academical year 2014-15

The Board received the extract showing Stage 1 (referral to Chairs of Examiners) and Stage 2 (Examination Review Committee) statistics for 2011/12 – 2014/15 circulated as **BE151609**.

Date of next meeting

2pm, Tuesday 22 March 2016.