A meeting of the Board of Examinations was held on Wednesday 18 March 2015 in the Old Schools Meeting Room.

Present: Professor G Virgo (Chair); Dr A Bell; Professor C Forsyth; Dr D Good; Mr D Goode; Dr M Jones; Rev Canon H Shilson-Thomas; Mr T Milner; Mr R Richardson; Mrs C Fage (Secretary); Mrs J Green (In attendance)

Apologies: Dr J Keeler; Dr D Woodman; Dr E Silva

1. Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 19 November 2014

The minutes were approved as a correct record. The Board received and accepted the Action Summary.

4. Matters Arising not appearing on the Agenda

There were no matters arising.

5. Secretary’s Action

The Board received a paper listing Secretary’s action. The following point was noted;

5.1 That the ‘Keeping Healthy during Ramadan’ guide was with members of the working group for comment and the policy was being determined alongside operational considerations. There had been some delay in progress due to perceived concerns about collection of personal data, which has since been resolved. Further work will continue and the working party will re-convene. The Board was reassured that the University would seek to avoid clashes with festivals of faith that prevent candidates from taking examinations, but would not guarantee that such clashes will not occur and in such circumstances examination adjustments would be considered.

6. Examination Review

The Board received the papers from the first meeting of the Examination Review body and agreed that minutes from future meetings should be received at meetings of the Board. Further, it was agreed that any straightforward operational decisions requiring approval of the Board could be dealt with by electronic circulation. The following points were also noted;

6.1 Minute 3 from the Review meeting identified regulation 3 of the Board of Examinations as seeming superfluous to the Board’s primary focus of examinations. The Chair reported that a working group on space strategy was being set up to review the suitability and quality of existing lecture and examinations space and to inform forward planning. It would also consider university space that was not in the available centrally bookable space, but potentially suitable for examinations.
6.2 It was reported that the examination review was being discussed in various committees and fora and it may be necessary to communicate wider to ensure colleagues’ expectations of the review were realistic.

7 Examination operations – script collection

7.1 The Board welcomed the trial and agreed that, for certain examinations and venues, script collection, and where appropriate, question paper, should continue and that students should remain in their seats until these have been collected. The Board recognised the potential benefits of staggered evacuation of the examination room. Students, colleges and faculties would be informed of this change in practice, alongside advertising outside the venue. The Board requested a report on the outcome of this new process in the Michaelmas term.

8 Missing Students

8.1 The Board accepted the paper on missing student and student attendance, and agreed that there would be no change of practice for the Easter term 2015. Further, it identified the need to decouple the issues of those students for whom there may be tutorial concern, from those who are late for other reason.

8.2 It was agreed that further data was required to understand the reasons for missing and late students, which could be collected from the examinations in the Easter term.

8.3 The Board agreed to consider a policy on missing students for the next academic year, acknowledging that it would require wider consultation across the collegiate university. This issue would be reconsidered in the Michaelmas term.

9 Any other business

9.1 Use of an amanuensis in an examination

The Chair spoke to a number of cases that had been discussed between the Secretary, the Head of the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) and himself regarding whether an amanuensis should be able to type a candidate’s examination. The current policy indicates that an amanuensis should only write the answer.

The Board agreed that this policy is still current and that an amanuensis should not be able to type. Any further concerns about this form of examination adjustment should be managed through rest breaks and / or additional time on a case by case basis.

9.2 Illegible scripts

Professor Forsyth tabled a paper outlining an issue that arose in the examination period 2014 regarding illegible scripts within the Faculty of Law, asking for clarification on the warning of ‘grave disadvantage’ and at what point transcription should be requested. The Board agreed that this required further consideration and any change to policy was too late for the examinations in the Easter term 2015.
It did agree
- To advise students that, even if a script is transcribed, they may still be at a grave disadvantage as to the mark awarded, as they had not communicated their thoughts effectively;
- To advise Examiners that if a script is partially illegible they should mark only on what they can judge;
- To advise Examiners that transcription is required when the script is illegible such that an Examiner is not able to make a secure judgement about the quality of the work as a whole;
- To revisit the policy and then determine what penalties might be implemented from 2015/16 where transcription is required.

9.3 Appeals procedure for Reasonable Adjustments in Examinations

The Chair alerted the Board to a conflict of interest on the appeals process against a decision on an examination adjustment. The current process would see the Chair be both first and second stage appeal. It was agreed that the first stage appeal would be to the Chair, and the second stage to the Chair of the Applications Committee,