



**A meeting of the Board of Examinations was held on Wednesday 13 July 2014 in the Syndicate Room at the Old Schools.**

Present: Professor J Rallison (Chair); Dr D Good; Rev Dr J Holmes; Mr T Milner; Mr Robert Richardson; Rev Canon H Shilson-Thomas; Mr R Taplin; Dr D Woodman; Mrs C Fage (Secretary); Mrs J Green (In attendance)

Apologies: Professor P Allmendinger; Dr M Jones; Dr J Keeler; Dr R Thornton

### **1. Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed the new CUSU representative, Mr Robert Richardson.

The Chairman thanked the teams who supported the examination process for the 2014 season including the Proctors and the staff of the Student Registry.

### **2. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 12 March 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 not on the Agenda.

### **5. Secretary's Action**

The Board received a paper listing Secretary's action. The following points were noted;

- 5.1 That a working group would be established to draft policy on faith-related provision for university examinations, ready to present to the November 2014 meeting of the Board.
- 5.2 The Board noted the change in dates for the Academic year 2014/15.

### **6. Proctors Report 2014**

The Senior Proctor presented the Proctors report. The report's key themes included;

- 6.1 Inadequate preparation for and uncertainty in examinations, particularly MPhil examinations, occurring before the main period including; lack of provision for extra time candidates; inadequate communication from course organisers on the meaning of reading time (see below) and the responsibilities of course organisers to prepare their students for university examinations.



- 6.2 Ongoing challenges to provide suitable examination venues, both now and in the future and adequate staff and technology to support delivery of the examinations. The challenges extend to making efficient use of space, and timetabling examinations to limit disruption.
- 6.3 Confusion encountered by invigilators and students in interpreting meaning of 'reading time'. Consequences of this ambiguity led to differing practice, where some papers included compulsory reading times and others offered it as an option. In some examinations students were not permitted to make notes during the reading time period, in others they were.

The Board agreed that for practical reasons reading time should be defined unambiguously as a period when the candidate is permitted to read the examination paper but is not permitted to write. The examination rubric must state the length of the reading time if it is included and the length of the examination in total.

In addition, Faculties and Departments must use the Form and Conduct notices to make their intentions clear.

- 6.4 Operational issues, including, mistakes in examination papers, insufficient numbers of invigilators and the inadequacies of the technology currently supporting the examination process. For the first time, the Proctors encountered the use of e-cigarettes. The Board agreed to amend regulations to ban the use of vapour and non-vapour products.
- 6.5 Concerns about the calibre of the invigilators and the appointment and briefing process of all casual support staff recruited for the examination process.
- 6.6 The report noted that three cases of alleged unfair means and/or plagiarism had been referred to the University Advocate and other incidents managed by the Proctors.
- 6.7 Exuberance at post-examination celebrations was reported as being reduced in 2014, due to a considered campaign by the Proctors. By working closely with the colleges and CUSU, and the appointment of additional pro-proctors, the number of incidents significantly reduced and no fines were issued. The Chairman congratulated the Proctors on the improvements and the need to maintain momentum to prevent a repeat of previous years.
- 6.8 The Proctors raised concern about the timing of the publication of appointment lists of Chairman and Senior Examiners.

The Proctors report made a number of recommendations, all of which were agreed to be taken forward by the staff of the Student Registry.

**7 Secretary's Report**

The Secretary presented her report to the Board for 2014. The Secretary advised that the report followed a new format. Whilst retaining the section on statistical data, the report aimed to offer some consideration on trends and anomalies and reflect on issues and concerns that arose throughout all the examinations. The report also sought to consider the examinations as a whole and aimed to link concerns rather than consider each in isolation.

The Board welcomed the new format and agreed as recommended in the report:

- 7.1 To recommend to the General Board's Education Committee a review of exam operations in conjunction with the Board of Examinations. The outcome of that review might be a five-year plan that, having considered the trends and concerns, sets the direction on such matters as efficient use of the estate for exams; examination timetabling; managing corrections; missing students; script distribution; exam arrangements; staffing; exam preparation; technical investment; and future direction of exams. The Board considered that the present levels of flexibility of provision (e.g. in the total length of exam papers, or the use of particular faculty premises) may well be unsustainable. In addition the present arrangements (hallowed by tradition) 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.
- 7.2 To issue a summary of the Secretary's report to college, faculties and departments for them to understand the scale of the activity and analyse against own provision and data;
- 7.3 To conduct a review of the question paper template, with faculties and departments, for implementation in Easter term 2015

Additional bus provision had not been used by students. In consequence it was agreed that the extra bus services should not be provided in 2014-15 or in subsequent years.

Concern was expressed how the review of Masters provision might impact on the Proctors time, General Admission and Honorary Degrees. Members were advised that the November meeting would consider this further. .

**8 Guidelines for special Examination Arrangements**

The Board received the guidelines for 2014-15. The Secretary advised that these had been improved to offer better signposting and clearer language and, following concern expressed by the Board in March 2014, 6.7 incorporated guidance on extra time for international students. It also allowed the use of an external adjudicator where a student was not satisfied with the decision. Paragraph 6.7 had been developed in conjunction with the Legal Services Office, Head of Educational and Student Policy and the Disability Resource Centre.

The Board approved the change and the guidelines.

**9 Any other business**

- 9.1 The Secretary reported an item from the University Advocate regarding operational issues identified from cases of alleged unfair means. It was agreed that these would be considered alongside the proposed review from the Secretary's report.



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**minutes**

- 9.2 On behalf of the members of the Board, the Senior Proctor thanked Professor Rallison for his service to the Board of Examinations since 2009 and wished him well on his retirement.