



A meeting of the Board of Examinations was held on Tuesday 29 November 2016 in the Student Registry.

Present: Professor G Virgo (Chair); Dr G Burgess; Mr G Chesterman; Dr P Johnston; Mr T Milner; Dr W Nolan; Dr C Ristuccia; Mrs C Fage (Secretary); Mrs J Green (In attendance)

Apologies: Ms R Huldisch; Dr N Rutter; Dr E Silva; Professor H Thompson; Dr R Thornton; Professor C Young

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2016 were approved.

2. Starred items

The Board agreed to unstar the business under 'Matters arising' relating to 'Instructions to Candidates', but otherwise approve the starred items.

3. Matters arising

The paper on Instructions to Candidates was discussed with agreement that a revised version would be approved by circulation.

4. Principal items of business

4.1 Rubric changes

Following the Board's revision of the rubric at the meetings in March and September 2016, the Board approved a new rubric. If adopted, this new version would replace that approved by the Board in March 2016. If the Board wishes to implement the new version, then existing stock must be disposed of securely and new stock ordered, which would cost as follows:

£6,858.00	to write off existing stock
£320.00	to shred securely existing stock
£7,000.00	to order new stock

In light of the costs, the Board considered whether the change was so important to introduce immediately or to delay. It was felt that, whilst the previous version did not lead to any requests for examination allowances, the previous version included a statement on illegible scripts that was open to challenge, contained grammatical errors, and was unclear to candidates. Therefore, whilst the Board was conscious of the cost of an immediate introduction (i.e. £7,500 to write off and dispose securely existing stock and £7,000 to order new stock) in principle, it preferred the new rubric.

The Board agreed to recommend to the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC) to dispose of the existing stock and order the new stock for use as soon as possible in the 2017 calendar year.

Action: For GBEC to rule on the recommendation

4.2 Reading time in the Faculty of Law

The Board received a paper from the Faculty of Law seeking permission to formalise reading time within their Tripos and Master of Law examinations from 2017-18. Following discussion on the current varied practice of reading time, the differing times identified as reading time across different Triposes, and the need to standardise procedures to support core examination operations, **it was agreed to:**

- Include reading time in Regulations, where it formed an official part of the examination;
- Aim to standardise the amount of reading time across the system;
- Consult those Faculties and Departments which currently offer reading time, as well as Colleges;
- Inform the Faculty of Law that a decision will be relayed after the consultation.

Action: For the Secretary to lead the consultation and report to the Board in March 2017

4.3 Examination Space

A discussion paper reporting on the issue of examination space across the university estate had been circulated 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:

- Reflected on examination space in 2015-16 and projected space requirements for examinations in 2016-17, highlighting increase in costs;
- Summarised losses and gains of venues in the short term as well as those venues which were at risk, those requiring temporary decant and those the Board prefers to avoid;
- Suggested that, with redevelopment plans across the estate, examination space would shrink and, consequently, the search for new permanent space should continue.

The Board was asked to consider the following recommendations:

- a) To classify the Sports Hall, Fenner's and the Crausaz Wordsworth Building as a vital part of the examination provision and so allow the Secretary to increase the annual bid via the planning round for the ongoing release of funds to cover these costs.
- b) For the Secretary to continue to prepare decant plans to accommodate examinations.
- c) For the Secretary to continue to identify new space in Departments and Faculties, Colleges and non-School space, bringing it on stream as resource allows and phasing out less suitable space.
- d) That the Board continues to review provision annually.

The Board agreed to all the recommendations without change and expressed its concern over the lack of suitable space across the estate, and of the space that is in use, that which is inadequate.

The Board requested that Senior Tutors investigate whether College space might be offered for examinations, for which it was anticipated that payment would be made.

4.4 Examination costs and budget

4.4.1 Examination costs

Following the interim costs presented in the Secretary's report at the September meeting, the Board received a paper outlining expenditure that is more complete for 2015-16. The Secretary advised that due to current accounting practices it was difficult to present clear and comparable year-on-year data. However, plans were in place to improve this over the next two financial years.

It was noted that until recently there had been no link between the policy approval of new courses, and changes or increases to courses, and the financial impact this has on the subsequent increase in examinations. This would now be factored into future changes to courses.

The Board welcomed the move to more transparency with costs and modelling to determine per capita costs, by student or by exam would be attempted.

4.4.2 Casual staff pay rates

The Secretary proposed a salary scale model and payment rates for casual staff for 2016-17, noting the salary scale model was new for 2016-17. This allowed clear separation of responsibility and salary between different supervisors and invigilators.

The Board approved the model and pay rates for 2016-17, noting the additional cost this will incur.

4.5 College feedback

The Board received collated feedback from Colleges on the exam season 2015-16 and **agreed** that the Secretary should send a note back to the Senior Tutor responsible for collecting the feedback on the operational considerations identified in the feedback.

4.6 Examination Review

The Board received a copy of the Progress Report issued by the Examination Review working group to the General Board, the Education Committee of the General Board and the Senior Tutors' Committee. It noted that the Examination Adjustments working party (a sub-group of the Examination Review) would ask the Secretary to bring to the Board draft standard arrangements for specific causes of late applications.

The Board might consider these standard arrangements by circulation.

4.7 Length of typed Examination answers

The Board received a paper from the Faculty of Law regarding the length of those examination answers that are typed and suggesting that an advisory word limits should be set. The Board was reminded of research undertaken by the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) that demonstrated that there is no evidence of any advantage to those students who type examinations rather than write, although it was accepted that there is evidence of students writing more in essay-based questions.

It was agreed that the Secretary would respond to the Faculty noting its concerns, yet indicating that the Board of Examinations did not support their proposal and would also submit the DRC research to the Faculty for consideration.