

This Bulletin reviews achievements and progress on items from Bulletins issued in 2013-14 and looks forward to work in this academic year.

## 1. Review of 2013-14

For information

### 1.1. Improving fee data in CamSIS

The project, to obtain a stable and efficient fees configuration process, went live for academic year 2014-15. Overall this was successful but there were some issues with fees being charged to students who should have been given fees exemptions. These issues have now been resolved, and we plan to complete the system updates for fees exempt students earlier in future to avoid this reoccurring. Ausra Gudeliauskaite has recently been appointed to as fees administrator and will lead on fees related work within the Registry.

### 1.2. Examinations

Whilst some expressed concern about the Sports Centre, it proved to be a suitable examination, as acknowledged by the [Board of Scrutiny](#). Those sitting examinations in this venue deemed it a success, and so it will continue to be a key venue in the main examination period.

See 3.1 for a more detailed reflection on examinations which led to support for an examination review (under the Chair of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education, Professor Graham Virgo) that aims to set the direction on examination policy and operations.

### 1.3. Graduate Student Funding

We coordinated the funding competitions for the central scholarship schemes and the AHRC and ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships, and arranged the allocation of over £2.4 million in funding to 106 Doctoral and 68 Masters students.

2014 saw the pilot of the Newton/College/CHESS MPhil scheme, under which funds provided by Colleges and CHESS were matched with funds from the Isaac Newton Trust to provide scholarships for Masters students. The scheme provided funding for 40 students (although there were 54 available awards), compared to 12 in 2013 and 16 in 2012.

In October, we circulated the timetable and guidance document for the 2015 competitions to departments.

### 1.4. Lecture room bookings

From the start of July, we used the university-booking tool 'MICAD' for the first time to manage the bulk allocation of lecture rooms. Some of the allocations were straightforward, whilst others were more challenging. We are looking to improve our role in this. However, since some of the issues extend beyond our work, Estate Management is setting up a MICAD user group to reflect on those issues, determine possible improvements and feed into a new Project Board looking at a new University-wide room-booking system.

## 1.5. HESA: Student finance

Thank you for all the work undertaken to meet the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) requirement to record and report information related to the financial support provided to H/EU undergraduate students (including those in the clinical years) and the PGCE. Total reported support is £11.4m but it is possible that this is not the maximum that could have been reported. The data have not yet, however, been reviewed in detail.

Since this requirement is now part of the annual return to HESA, over this year, we will communicate the requirements and method of data collection.

## 2. Work in progress

For information

### 2.1 Funding review

The funding review group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education, continues to carry out a review of graduate funding throughout the collegiate University. To remind, the Group is revisiting the purpose of funding schemes held within the collegiate University, investigating opportunities for increased funding for new studentships and looking towards greater coordination of existing funds to improve the applicant experience. Currently, the Group hopes to conclude the review and produce a report in LT2015.

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### 2.2 Graduate Fee

Our work with UIS to produce a mechanism for storing information in CamSIS on Research Council funded students (and the proportion of funding provided by a Research Council) continues. Colleges and the University Finance team will use this information when calculating fee allocations. Collation of information on Research Council funded students is ongoing (and will now include details of students who started in MT14).

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### 2.3 Access to Learning Fund

Due to changes to HEFCE funding policy, it no longer provides a separate fund for Access to Learning. However, allocation of University funds allow the ALF to continue for 2014/15 and a review of hardship funding throughout the University is underway.

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### 2.4 Student Registry ambition

Over the year, we have worked to become one unit under the general identity of the Student Registry. We have recognised that whilst our work is student centred, most of our work is done alongside or for staff across the collegiate university and external bodies, such as Research Councils, North American loan companies. This alters the way we approach our work and how we do our work.

We have begun to change by organising our work and structure into themes (see Appendix B). Each theme has a specialist lead (or leads) who would offer you clearer points of contact. Before we launch

the detail, we are working in the new structure to ensure it works. Therefore, to ensure that we deliver on core operations, this change will occur gradually and we will share updates throughout the year.

To support the new way of working, our web needs a drastic overhaul to provide clearer and more precise information to students and to you. This will take time. I am grateful to those who have expressed willingness to feed into this development.

Sally-Ann Gannon will return from maternity leave in January 2015 and will resume her role as Head of Fees and Graduate Funding, providing oversight of the fees, funding, finance and loans themes.

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### 3 New for 2014-15

#### 3.1 Review of examinations

For information

The Board of Examinations (13 July 2014) received reports on examination operations from the Proctors and the Secretary of the Board of Examinations. The Board recommended that colleges, faculties and departments be informed of the scale of the activity and to allow institutions to compare with their own provision and data. Therefore, the following summarises scale of examination activity in 2013-14.

- Examinations occurred every month, except August;
- 1564 examinations scheduled, of which 1218 (78%) took place in May and June;
- 66,319 candidatures sat examinations, of which 56,702 (85%) were sat in May and June;
- Easter term exams ran 21 April – 09 May, and then from 19 May – 13 June;
- Busiest day, Monday 2 June with 5,089 candidatures (representing 9% of those who sat exams in ET);
- 32% examinations scheduled for less than or more than three hours' duration, which does not conform with '[Duration of Written Papers, Statutes and Ordinances, 2014](#), p.249);
- Examinations held in 36 different venues (3 external to the University), none specifically designed for examinations;
- 8 examination venues cost a total of £152,253.00 in May and June;
- Staff supporting examinations cost £128,032.82;
- 1,169 candidates took examinations in other locations, an increase of 16% on 2013-14;
- Increase in number of examinations sat early to accommodate religion/belief festivals;
- During week commencing 16 June: 8473 classes loaded, checked and released to students (with 31% / 2624 on Friday 20 June).

Careful consideration of the trends and concerns laid out in both reports (set out in appendix A) led the Board of Examinations to recommend to the General Board's Education Committee a review of examination operations in conjunction with the Board of Examinations. The Education Committee accepted that recommendation and stated that the review should extend to cover review of examination policy including format and volume of examination.

It will also consider the recommendation in the Nineteenth Report of the Board of Scrutiny that 'the University address the variable nature and suitability of all spaces used for examinations'.

The expectation is that the examination review would deliver a five-year plan that, having considered the trends and concerns and challenged present arrangements, sets the direction on examination policy and operations.

Under the Chair of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education, the terms of reference and membership are being finalised. We shall communicate progress and outcomes.

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### 3.2 Industrial Action

For information

The HR Division recently circulated information that the University and College Union (UCU) has secured a mandate to call on its members to take action short of a strike in the form of an assessment and marking boycott commencing from 6 November 2014.

The information is also available on the HR website: <http://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/industrial-action-commencing-6-november-2014>

The institutional guidance mentioned that any queries regarding any student and assessment/examination issues should be addressed to the Head of the Student Registry/Secretary of the Board of Examinations.

**Contact:** Catherine Fage, [caf28@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:caf28@admin.cam.ac.uk)

**All other queries:** [industrial.action@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:industrial.action@admin.cam.ac.uk).

### 3.3 List of candidates enrolled for examinations

New feature

From Michaelmas term 2014, departments and colleges can run lists of candidates enrolled into examinations on demand via CamSIS.

For guidance on how to run the report, visit:

[www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/staff/exams/college/RunningListsofCandidates.pdf](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/students/studentregistry/staff/exams/college/RunningListsofCandidates.pdf)

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**Examination Concerns**

- **Exam length:** operational difficulties arise now that 32% exams are either shorter or longer than the expected duration of three hours<sup>1</sup>, including inadequacies of the estate to accommodate different exam times in separate venues and subsequent disruption caused by exams finishing at different times.
- **Exam venues:** none of the 36 venues are designed for exams. For example, wooden boards are attached to lecture rooms, carpet laid to protect floors, remedial action taken to level desks. All venues incur a staffing cost, most incur set-up costs (moving of exam furniture, laying carpets), and some incur hire costs. Building work creates pressure on usable space and requires strategies to manage noise.
- **Staff supporting exams:** besides the cost, there are two main concerns (i) a dependency on a core number of long-serving staff with an aging profile and, (ii) where new staff are needed, a recurring difficulty to recruit staff who understand our exams.
- **Exam arrangements:** This year 1169 candidates sat exams in other locations, an increase of 16% on 2013. However, the number sitting in the Pitt (the most expensive exam venue per head in 2014) decreased this year. The increase placed pressure on:
  - colleges, who experienced 32% increase in candidates sitting exams in college;
  - reprographics, whose accommodation is at capacity and cannot absorb any further increase in numbers;
  - our ability to distribute quickly scripts across the estate to Examiners.

There was a notable increase in anxiety levels, and it seemed particularly amongst first year students that led to increase in examination arrangements. The Secretary is working with the University Counselling Service and the Disability Resource Centre to develop materials, and possible support sessions, to enable students to manage anxiety. Whilst this might alleviate some of the anxiety, it might not address the issue that may stem from the frequency and intensity of the examination process.

- **Format of examination question papers:** the lack of adherence to the recommended format causes operational problems that can have a negative impact on the student and their exam.
- **Corrections:** for every error, the Exam Office must relay the correction or clarification to all students as quickly as possible. However, this is not as prompt as would like because:
  - we must communicate to multiple venues;
  - some venues have inadequate technology links;
  - some of the corrections/clarifications are illegible;
  - this exercise occurs whilst we are trying to report missing students.
- **Reading time:** the rules concerning this are unclear, and therefore difficult to implement and police, especially when rubric does not convey that reading time is permitted and accounted for in the exam.
- **Missing scripts:** every year scripts go missing, and whilst the proportion is extremely low it creates anxiety amongst students and departments, often leading to complaints. The time and effort taken to investigate missing scripts also coincides with running exams and dealing with other concerns (such as missing students, corrections). Most exam venues preclude collection of scripts and the current

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<sup>1</sup> *Duration of Written Examination Papers*, p. 249, S&O 2014

(Extract from the 2014 report of the Secretary of the Board of Examinations)

distribution system has limited capacity to track from production to delivery to the examiner. The number of exams occurring in alternative venues also adds to the risk. Furthermore, the demands from departments to accommodate their requirements add an extra layer of complexity.

- **Illegible scripts:** has nearly doubled in number from 2012 (26 scripts in 2012, 48 scripts in 2014). Whilst the numbers are relatively small compared to total number of scripts it might suggest an upward trend that might continue to increase as students increasingly produce and submit electronic work rather than handwritten.
- **Missing students:** currently, venues report missing students to the Exam Office who then check whether the student is a late faller, and if not the Office reports the missing student to College. College then try to locate student and get student to venue within 30-minutes of the exam start time, which is often not achievable. This results in either the candidate sitting the exam in College (which requires re-distribution of the script, college invigilator etc.) or, by exception, the student is allowed in the exam room after the permitted time.

However, this does not work well because of the:

- inability to identify missing students in some venues;
  - limited technology in venues to report to the Exam Office;
  - dilemma of when to report a student is missing knowing that a student may enter up to 30-minutes from the start of an exam;
  - pressure on the Exam Office to manage this with other priorities, e.g. corrections.
- **Technology:** The Exam Office requires a level of technology to support examination operations, predominantly to support staff in those locations, report quickly missing students and to receive exam corrections and then promptly to circulate to candidates sitting in other (multiple) locations. However,
    - some venues do not have a telephone or fax line available, and so communication occurs through using mobiles owned by staff;
    - pagers are not available as means of notifying staff at the venues that they are required.

The Exams Office currently relies on fax technology; however, this is becoming increasingly unsuitable because,

- the technology is quite dated;
- there is limited availability of suitable outlets to allow use of fax machines;
- the transmitted information is often of poor quality making it difficult to transmit on to candidates in other locations.

The lack of technology limits the speed of the work of the Exam Office and accuracy.

- **Overview of examinations:** understandably, each faculty and department is concerned with its own exams and wishes the best. However, the lack of understanding of the whole exam activity leads to individual demands, some of which cannot be delivered.
- **Strategic direction:** it seems that exam operations run year-to-year and in isolation of other strategic work, for example, space utilisation, building work and other strategic vision of examinations.

(Overview of Student Registry activities organised by theme)

