

BoS 19 July 2023

Wednesday, 19th July 2023 2:15 pm

Teams | Faculty of Science Board of Studies

Attendees

Attended

Rachael Bedford

Florin Bisset

Teresa Buckley

Zoe Burke

Andrew Burrows

Duncan Craig (Chair)

Susan Crennell

Charlotte Dodson

Nikoletta Fotaki

Paula Gabriel

Marguerite Hallett (Secretary)

Amanda Harper

Philip Ingham

Matthew Jones

Frances Laughton

Eamonn O'Neill

Philip Rogers

Tony Shardlow

Gan Shermer

Gunnar Traustason

Michael Wright

Did Not Attend

Elizabete Francmane

Julia Kildyushova

Matthew Lennox

Fei Qin

Tim Rogers

Jeyabal Sivaloganathan

Dmitry Skryabin

Ventsislav Valev

Stephen Ward

Zidong Zhao

1.0 Welcome and Quorum (7448)

The Chair welcomed members, noted apologies and observed that the meeting was quorate. The Chair thanked the following members, for whom this would be their last BoS meeting:

- Dr Nikoletta Fotaki for being a member of BoS for the past 6 years.
- Dr Matthew Lennox for being a member of BoS (E&D rep) for the past year.
- The student reps Elizabete Francmane, Julia Kildyushova, Zidong Zhao.

2.0 Declarations of Interest (7449)

Dr Laughton reported that she had declared an interest at the Physics BEP. Dr Laughton stated that she did not consider herself compromised in terms of making a completely objective contribution. The Board therefore agreed that Dr Laughton could still participate fully in discussions.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (7450)

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 July 2023 (Paper 264).

4.0 Matters Arising (7451)

Minute 7426 Chair's Business:

The Board noted that the Secretary had flagged to Registry that online MSc students who were graduating alongside UG finalists needed to be provided with the same level of detail in the communications to them about results and MAB impact as the UG students. The Director of Academic Registry had advised that the communications team was working with LPO and Registry to ensure that there were online PGT-specific FAQs and information. Department colleagues were welcome to raise any areas where they thought further information for students would be helpful. The current online PGT information webpage links to the general industrial action FAQs page which had been kept up to date and included the more detailed explanations of marking and policy that were relevant to all students. The team was trying to keep information to all types of students as current as possible; all published information had, by necessity given the circumstances, a complex approvals process which occasionally delayed timeliness. Work was ongoing to support results release for continuing students on 20 July; updating information

for online PGT would be part of that urgent and ongoing work.

5.0 Chair's Business (7452)

The Chair brought the following matter to the attention of the Board:

The UG graduation ceremony had gone well, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor had commented that the turnout from staff from the Faculty had been exemplary. The Chair thanked all staff who had attended the ceremonies and receptions.

6.0 Semester 2 Scaling Report and Errors in Examination Papers (7453)

The Board considered scaling of unit marks (Paper 265A) and errors in examination papers (Paper 265B) in Semester 2 2022/23. The Board noted that there had been 24 instances of scaling (compared to 22 in Semester 2 last year); 2 in Biology & Biochemistry (0 last year), 4 in Chemistry (0 last year), 7 in Computer Science (7 last year), 7 in Maths (9 last year), 1 in Pharmacy & Pharmacology (0 last year) and 3 in Physics (6 last year), including 8 units (2 in Comp Sci, 4 in Maths, 1 in Pharmacy & Pharmacology and 1 in Physics) where the mean marks were not atypical, and 65 instances (excluding IFY units) of means that were atypical but not scaled (compared to 44 last year). Errors in examination papers had reduced slightly in both semesters compared to last year.

Professor Burrows reported that a core Year 1 (CH10135) and core Year 2 unit (CH20147/8) had been scaled as a result of students lacking the necessary study skills for returning to in-person examinations. Year 2 had a tail as a result of these students having gained entry based on teacher predicted grades. The units with means that were atypical but not scaled generally had small cohorts. CH30189 was scaled because the MCQ synoptic examination had been more challenging than intended. There had been 2 errors in examination papers (unrelated to the scaled units) which had been fairly minor. Professor Burrows requested that departments inform the Faculty IMC Panel in advance of any instances where examination paper errors had affected students in sole venues differently than the rest of the cohort, e.g. because they received corrections / missing guidance late.

Dr M Wright reported that online MSc units with means that were atypical but not scaled generally had small cohorts of high performing students. Dr M Wright added that the Department had run examination preparation lectures and mock examinations to facilitate students returning to in-person examinations. Year 1 students had engaged the most with these sessions.

Dr T Shardlow reported that a number of Year 2 units had been scaled as a result of these students having gained entry based on teacher predicted grades and not understanding the basic material due to Covid disruption. Dr T Shardlow commented that the errors in examination papers had been fairly minor. It was easy to make small errors given the technical nature of the subject, despite multiple checking procedures.

Dr P Rogers reported that AP3T units with means that were atypical but not scaled were due to the cohort comprising high performing students. Year 2 had a long tail as a result of these students having gained entry based on teacher predicted grades, lacking the foundation skills and knowledge due to Covid disruption and not being well prepared for the return to in-person examinations despite preparation sessions provided by the Skills Centre. Engagement and attendance from the Year 2 cohort had been patchy; there were significant numbers of low-level mental health problems in the cohort. The External Examiners had reported similar problems in their institutions. There had been 2 fairly significant errors in examination papers in terms of required material not having been printed. The Department would ensure that a final galley proof check was installed for future examination papers before they go to print, e.g. to check for Mac vs PC clashes. The Unit Convenor used to sign off a final print check but this had not happened consistently this year, partly due to compressed deadlines.

Action: The Board agreed to recommend as best practice a final sign off of examination papers in advance of the deadline for submission to the print unit.

The Board noted that the Faculty needed to familiarise itself with the usual procedures in place pre-Covid for examination paper checking.

Action: The Board agreed to flag to Registry that a number of Assistant Invigilators (PG students) had not attended the examinations to which they had been allocated, e.g. whether to consider employing professional invigilators externally.

Dr G Shermer reported similar issues with the Examinations Office, including examination materials not having been made available.

Dr F Laughton reported that units PH30078 and PH40085 had been scaled up and had involved online examinations, whereas all examinations for other units had been in-person, and the same main lecturer. It was unclear as to whether students had expected that the form of questions would be different to those in a closed-book in-person examination. Dr F Laughton reported that all examinations would be in-person next year. PH40084 had been scaled, possibly as the result of having been more affected than most units by the industrial action. The students had complained immediately after the examination that it had been too challenging. Units that had means higher than the typical range were project units and/or MPhys units involving high performing students. Dr Laughton commented that the errors in examination papers had related to mathematical units with equations, where an error in the equation would have a significant impact on the question. Dr Laughton acknowledged that some staff made more errors in examination papers than others and that this needed to be addressed in terms of more preemptive vetting, although often increasing the scrutiny can reduce the responsibility assumed by the examination paper setter. Dr R Bedford reported that in the Department of Psychology all units were co-taught by multiple lecturers so each examination paper was checked and signed off by all of the unit's lecturers, which reduced the chance for errors, and at other institutions a GTA is assigned per unit to check examination papers to ensure double checking procedures are inbuilt into the process.

Action: The BoS agreed a need to work towards a more uniformed protocol for examination paper scrutiny and sign off.

7.0 Faculty Doctoral Studies Committee (7454)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 (Paper 266).

8.0 University Board of Studies (Doctoral) (7455)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 (Paper 267).

9.0 Any Other Business (7456)

There was none.