

BoS 22 May 2024

Wednesday, 22nd May 2024 2:15pm

Teams | Faculty of Science Board of Studies

Attendees

Attended

Zoe Burke

Andrew Burrows (AB)

Duncan Craig (Chair)

Susan Crennell

Charlotte Dodson

Marguerite Hallett (Secretary)

Amanda Harper

Momna Hejmadi

Philip Ingham

Matthew Jones

Eamonn O'Neill (E'ON)

Jeyabal Sivaloganathan

Ventsislav Valev

Michael Wilson

Rhod Woodhouse

Did Not Attend

Florin Bisset

Sarah Upendra Chandratreya

Ffion Gould

Charareh Pourzand

Fei Qin

Tim Rogers

Tony Shardlow

Gan Shermer

Dmitry Skryabin

Gunnar Traustason

David Tsang

Michael Wright

Miranda Yafi

1.0 Welcome and Quorum (7589)

The Chair welcomed members, noted apologies and observed that the meeting was quorate.

2.0 Declarations of Interest (7590)

There were no declarations of any potential conflicts of interest.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (7591)

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 April 2024 (Paper 221).

4.0 Matters Arising (7592)

M7574 Semester 1 Scaling Report and Errors in Examination Papers:

The Board noted that the Department had clarified that the pre-scaled mean for SL20024 had in fact been 51.72% (not 52.01% as originally reported). The BEU minute and scaling report had been updated to reflect this.

5.0 Chair's Business (7593)

The Chair reported that prizes will not be read out or appear in the brochure in the July ceremonies. Prizes were not included in the ceremonies last year due to the MAB. This will be reassessed with the Graduation Working Group over the summer.

6.0 Report on Research Grants (7594)

The Board received details of awards accepted by Research and Innovation Services from 10 April until 14 May 2024 (Paper 222).

The Chair congratulated in particular:

- Professor Manuel Del Pino, Department of Mathematical Sciences, for his award of £1,551,647 from the EPSRC for research into AsymEvol - Asymptotic Patterns and Singular Limits in Nonlinear Evolution Problems.
- Professor Jonathan Knight, Department of Physics, for his award of £637,968 from Sumitomo Electric Industries for research into Low Loss Anti-Resonant Hollow Core Fibres.

The Board noted that there was one award in Physics with zero value as no overheads came to the University.

7.0 Report on the Use of Student Teaching Assistants 2023/24 (7595)

The Board monitored the involvement of, and arrangements for, students undertaking teaching activities, to report on this activity to EQSC in June:

Life Sciences: Biology and Biochemistry (Paper 223).

Chemistry (Paper 224).

Computer Science (Paper 225).

Mathematical Sciences (Paper 226).

Life Sciences: Pharmacy and Pharmacology (Paper 227).

Physics (Paper 228).

The Board noted that the previously agreed upper limits of 7 hours/week for PGR and 3.5 hours/week for UG & PGT had been exceeded for a small number of STA in the Department of Mathematical Sciences, but that the normal limits (i.e. of 6 hours/week for PGR and 3 hours/week for UG & PGT) would be adhered to for 2024/25.

8.0 Faculty guidance on scaling (7596)

The Chair reported that the Board has had a series of discussions about scaling and there was general agreement to try to minimise scaling and only use it in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where either academic standards or the interests of students would be compromised without it; scaling should not be used as a routine tool to tidy up marks. At the last meeting, the Board worked through the Semester 1 scaling decisions and discussed what might or might not be reasonable grounds for scaling and how to mitigate against scaling in forthcoming years. Registry have been consulted and recognise that the scaling guidance in QA35 could be usefully refreshed and given a greater level of clarity as to when, how and why scaling is appropriately used.

The Chair highlighted that BEUs make the initial decision on scaling, which is then ratified by the BEC and Board of Studies (BoS). However, before the decision reaches the BEC and BoS the results are released to the students, making it difficult to revisit scaling decisions, thereby putting BEUs in a difficult position. The Faculty scaling guidance (Paper 229) aims to introduce some uniformity and best practice to ensure that BEUs are assisted in making scaling decisions so that confidence can be reasonably placed in scaling decisions not being revisited post result release or with the effect of delaying results. AB added that the guidance is designed to avoid a situation in which scaling decisions become a *fait accompli* because the students have already been told the results, and it would be too embarrassing and reputationally damaging to go back

and change decisions; this is not a valid reason for a scaling decision. The Chair reported that the Faculty Executive Committee had supported the guidance at its meeting yesterday. AB reported that QA35 would be reviewed in the near future, probably over the next academic year, to remove some of the slight contradictions within it and make it more helpful to departments. The aim of the Faculty scaling guidance is not to remove autonomy from BEUs, but to avoid a situation in which a BEU recommendation to scale is not approved by the BEC or BoS. The guidance recommends that where a pre-BEU considers that scaling may be necessary, the Chair of the BEU alerts the Chairs of the BEC and BoS to initiate a discussion prior to the BEU. AB reminded that the concept of a pre-BEU is a preexisting recommendation of QA35 (paragraph 6.4.2): "Good preparation will ensure the smooth running of the BEU meeting. The Chair, Secretary and Director of Studies should meet in advance to consider any potential issues. Together with the Unit Convenor, scenarios should be prepared for those units with marks that may require scaling". It was acknowledged that the timeframe for consultation with the BEC and BoS Chairs would be tight. Where necessary, discussions could take place post BEU and pre-Semester 1 mark release (to then be agreed by the BEU virtually) to ensure BEC and BoS are supportive before marks are released to students. AB clarified that the purpose of the pre-BEU is to identify the units where there needs to be a discussion on scaling and to look at potential scenarios for the BEU to start working with, e.g. what and how to scale, what the effect of different methods of scaling would have on the mean and mark distribution. The pre-BEU enables the BEU to make an informed decision and work efficiently, spending its time productively; it may choose to recommend alternative scenarios, or a combination of the scenarios presented. The pre-BEU acts in an advisory, as opposed to instructional, capacity. It does not predetermine / make the decision; the decision still rests with the BEU. Instead, the work of the pre-BEU means that the BEU is not in a position of having to work through complex scenarios with the full membership in attendance, under time pressure. The Chair added that the Faculty guidelines are designed to help reduce the number of units being considered for scaling. The Chair acknowledged the tight turnaround time for Semester 1 marking, and that this is an issue that needs addressing institutionally, but emphasised the importance of ensuring that marking is checked properly so that confidence can be placed in its reliability. The Chair also emphasised the importance of setting assessments at the appropriate level in the first place, thereby removing the need for consideration of scaling. The guidance aims to support departments in removing the necessity for scaling. AB highlighted that the guidance is also designed to improve the minuting of scaling decisions, to ensure that decision-making is clear and fully justified. While it is helpful for minutes to reflect discussions, explanation is needed of how the end decision was reached so that the minute does not appear contradictory. The Board agreed to adopt the Faculty guidance on scaling with immediate effect, to be reviewed in a year's time.

9.0 Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (7597)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2024 (Paper 230). E'ON suggested that the Board submit an exemption request to EQSC from the Rule 2 requirement that Chief Invigilators will be members of academic staff. The Board supported this suggestion.

Action: BoS Secretary.

10.0 Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (7598)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 (Paper 231).

11.0 Faculty Executive Committee (7599)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2024 (Paper 232).

12.0 Faculty Doctoral Studies Committee (7600)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024 (Paper 233).

13.0 University Board of Studies (Doctoral) (7601)

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2024 (Paper 234).

14.0 Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings (7602)

The Board noted the minutes of the meetings held on:

Department of Life Sciences: Biology and Biochemistry 1 May 2024 (Paper 235).

Department of Chemistry 17 April 2024 (Paper 236).

Department of Computer Science 15 April (PGT) (Paper 237A) and 24 April (Paper 237B) 2024.

Natural Sciences 17 April 2024 (Paper 238).

Department of Life Sciences: Pharmacy and Pharmacology 27 March (PGT) (Paper 239A) and 17 April (Paper 239B) 2024.

15.0 Any Other Business (7603)

There was none.