



Senate

Paper Title	Review of assessment arrangements 2019-20 comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report of the External Member to the Degree Examination Boards (paper A)• UG H&SS DEB minutes (paper B)• UG S&E DEB minutes (paper C)• Lessons learned from 2019/20 alternative assessments (paper D)
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to consider and evaluate the assessment arrangements that were put in place for 2019-20, including impact of the coronavirus contingency regulations and policies . It is proposed that a report on the assessment arrangements for 2019-20 will form the basis of the academic assurance report to Council in November 2020. There will also be data on student outcomes available in the coming weeks and this will supplement the report to Council. Any reports on student outcomes will be circulated to Senate members for information as soon as these are available.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	Background Paper A , the report of the External Member of the Degree Examination Boards (DEB), is a significant document for quality and standards that is considered by EQSB each year. It is provided in full for Senate members this year, as it includes independent commentary on Queen Mary's assessment arrangements during 2019-21, and the impact of these on students and on academic standards. The role of the External Member of the Degree Examination Boards is a similar role to that of an external examiner, operating at degree rather than subject board level, and providing comments on issues of regulation, process, equity and consistency of approach. The current External Member is Maureen McLaughlin, Director of Education Policy and Quality at the University of Warwick (and previously Head of Universities and Standards at the Quality Assurance Agency). Maureen attended the two undergraduate DEBs on 24 July 2020 for which the redacted minutes of these DEBs are included as Paper B and Paper C . The redacted minutes are included for Senate's information as they contain extensive commentary from the DEBs and the constituent Subject Examination Boards (SEBs) on the arrangements in place. Paper D reflects on lessons learned from the alternative assessments in 2019-20. The paper was produced by members of the Education 3.1

	<p>sub-group on assessment and provides recommendations for the future, in addition to reflections on 2019-20.</p> <p>Points to note</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each paper confirms that the contingency arrangements were appropriate and effective, protecting both students and academic standards. • There has been an increase in so-called ‘good honours’ outcomes which is of some concern, but this issue is reflected across the sector this year – the External Member and the majority of external examiners accepted this and noted that 2020 would always be an exceptional year; when the contingency plans were made, institutions had rightly erred on the side of generosity to students and this had ensured protection of the student experience as far as was possible. • A small number of SEB external examiners had felt that the arrangements were overly generous, but these were in the minority. The Humanities and Social Sciences DEB had asked that Queen Mary consider a review of the arrangements to ensure that lessons could be learned for any comparable future situation, with a focus on EDI analysis. • There was some concern that students who had suffered little or no disadvantage had been able to use the arrangements strategically, while less advantaged students had not always gained the same benefits (though it was agreed that they had not suffered disadvantage). • The External Member’s report is very positive and endorses the contingency arrangements and management of the events of 2019-20. It includes recommendations for additional and more granular reporting, particularly on EDI issues, and also suggests that greater discussion of the roles of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) could take place at the DEBs (this was a particular issue in 2020 as it was necessary to confirm that our contingency arrangements were compliant with the PSRBs’ accreditation requirements). The issue of reporting will be addressed on two fronts – greater use of the Business Intelligence Tool, and a new SPIP working group focused on SEB reports. • As noted above, Senate will have the opportunity to review the data on student outcomes once this is finalised after examination boards have concluded.
<p>Questions for Senate to consider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate is asked to reflect on how appropriate and effective the contingency arrangements were during 2020; • Senate is asked to note the report of the External Member and comment on any of the issues raised; • Senate is asked to consider for approval that the review of the assessment arrangements for 2019-20, together with relevant data, should form the basis of the academic assurance report to Council in November 2020.
<p>Regulatory/statutory reference points</p>	<p>The Office for Students: Regulatory Framework Quality Assurance Agency: UK Quality Code for Higher Education</p>

Strategy and risk	<p>Excellence in Education Excellence in Student Engagement Excellence in Student Employability Excellence in Learning Environment</p>
Reporting/ consideration route for the paper	<p>Considered by the Education Quality and Standards Board on 23 September 2020</p> <p>A summary of the contingency arrangements themselves and the review to be considered by Council on 19 November 2020.</p>
Authors	<p>Maureen McLaughlin (paper A) Simon Hayter (papers B and C) Ana Cabral and Dr Nimesh Patel (paper D)</p>
Sponsor	<p>Professor Stephanie Marshall, Vice-Principal (Education)</p>

**EXTERNAL MEMBER'S ANNUAL REPORT
ON DEGREE EXAMINATION BOARDS
2019-20**

Name of external member	Maureen McLaughlin
Institution of external member	University of Warwick
Degree Examination board(s) attended (with dates)	HSS & S&E 24.7.2020

Your completed report should be submitted by e-mail to Alice de Havillan, Academic Quality and Standards Officer, at a.l.dehavillan@qmul.ac.uk within 30 days of the degree examination board meeting.

If you prefer, you may post your report in hard copy. If completing this by hand, you may need to enlarge the text boxes before printing. Please send any hard copy reports to:

Academic Secretariat (External Examiners)
ARCS, E10 Queens
Queen Mary University of London
Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS

Your report is intended for internal use only and will contribute towards aspects of Queen Mary's annual reporting procedures. Your report will be made available to students; **please do not include personal information (such as your home address) or identify individual students.**

If you would like to raise any issues of a sensitive nature directly with the Principal, please feel free to do so. The address is Principal Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS. Please do NOT use this form for this purpose.

This template is updated annually; the most recent version is available at:
<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/quality-assurance/external-examiners/external-examiners-resources/>

1. The Award Process

1.1 In your view, are the processes for the determination of progression and awards sound and fairly conducted and in line with national standards and expectations?

YES / NO (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

1.2 Please also comment for QM on:

- particular strengths and weaknesses in the progression and award process;
- the scheme for progression and for the classification of the award;
- the use of discretion, within the permitted scope of Queen Mary's policy;
- the interpretation of regulations.
- Impact of revised award rules in reaction to Covid-19

In so far as there are any comparable national standards and expectations operable in 2020, the processes for the determination of progression and awards at QMUL is in line with those I have witnessed in other HEIs, namely, they have ensured that students have not suffered any academic detriment as a result of the impact of CV19 on their studies and assessment and the actions taken have been appropriate to the context of students at this University.

The strength of the comprehensive approach has enabled the University to take full account of student achievements prior to the lockdown date and to take necessary supportive measures in relation to the consideration of marks achieved after this date, with appropriate actions such as late work extensions, extenuating circumstances, the discounting of 30 credits and systematic application of borderline rules in terms of classification. While this may have resulted in an overall greater percentage of 'good honours' degree outcomes in most disciplines, it is clear that appropriate rigour has been applied in terms of academic standards of the awards, due cognisance of PSRB requirements and the difficult circumstances under which students found themselves studying and being assessed during the period.

The only weaknesses I can see are more *perceived* than concrete, in that some may perceive that 'good honours' degrees awarded and progression rates may have increased as a result of more lenient assessment and/or marking. Externals examiners by and large (and with only a few exceptions) confirm that this has not been the case and the systematic approach adopted by the University which allowed it to reinstate previous regulations meant that academic staff were more familiar with the requirements. I would suggest that having some longitudinal statistical information relating to % progression rates and degree outcomes would enable SEBs and DEBs to have a clearer understanding of trends and a context for an explanation of patterns over time.

Progression and classification schemes were clear and had been applied consistently across the SEBS and the use of discretion and consideration of borderline cases had also been applied in a transparent and consistent manner (noting that the School of Law was yet to move to the general regulatory approach). The use of scaling had been minimal and managed appropriately when applicable. What was particularly impressive was the way in which module convenors had considered and articulated the impact of the revised award conventions and the wider University response to CV19 via the MIAs.

2. Examination Board Arrangements

2.1 Were you satisfied with the arrangements for, and conduct of, the Degree Examination Board meeting?

YES / NO (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

2.2 Were you satisfied with the decisions and recommendations of the Degree Examination Board meeting?

YES / NO (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

Yes, the meetings were very well supported by the paperwork preparations and intervention of the ARCS team, well chaired throughout and the presentations of Heads of School (or their representatives) ensured that decisions and recommendations were fully understood and made in the clear light of evidence available and the prudent application of the regulations.

2.3 Please also comment for QM on:

- particular strengths and weaknesses in the examination board arrangements;
- the suitability of the examination board documentation;
- the opportunities provided to you to participate fully in the Degree Examination Board meeting.

The documentation provided was of a high quality; particularly useful were the full minutes of each SEB and also the module impact assessments undertaken by module convenors to consider the impact of covid19 on the teaching, learning and assessment. Although the papers were not available until fairly close to the date of the meeting itself, they were comprehensive, clear and easily accessible and enabled me to understand the processes under consideration and for me to ask questions and make contributions throughout and at the end of each of the DEBs. The contribution made and support given by ARCS team to this process is exemplary and I felt that every attempt had been made to enable me to understand the approaches taken in 2020 and the impact this (and industrial action) had had on the TLA student experience in autumn and spring which was less universal in its impact and has been monitored accordingly.

3 Standard of student achievement

- 3.1 In your view, are the patterns of student achievement by degree classifications, comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK higher education institutions with which you are familiar.

YES / NO (if 'no', please state the reasons they fall short)

As far as I am aware this year, a number of HEIs are experiencing a higher percentage of good honours being awarded to graduating students and, as far as can be determined from considering the SEB outcomes, this would appear to be the same for QMUL, albeit that the borderline rules have to some extent managed this sensibly. What was notable is that some SEBS reported that the percentage increases were relatively modest and, in at least one case, attributable in part to the graduating cohort's extremely high entry tariff. This is certainly relatively consistent with patterns seen within my own institution this year.

- 3.2 Are there any other points on patterns of student achievement that you wish to direct to the attention of Queen Mary?

I have made comments elsewhere in the document in respect of student achievement patterns which might be better supported by the availability of the data considered by SEBS and aggregated to institutional level in the future, should the BI support this.

4 Issues of Procedure

If applicable, how did procedures/arrangements compare this year with previous years? Were suggestions made by you last year acted upon? If not applicable, please go to question 5.

This is my first year as an external in this capacity but can see that there has been a positive response to some of the suggestions raised by the previous external though, due to the unusual circumstances of this year, are perhaps not as sharply evident as they might otherwise have been (i.e. impact of BI on production and consideration of student achievement, scaling policies etc..).

5 General Comments

- 5.1 Are there any other further comments you might wish to draw to the attention of Queen Mary? In particular we would welcome your comments on the following
- How Queen Mary dealt with the impact of Industrial Action and Covid-19
 - Any aspects of exemplary practice.

The comprehensive but thorough process should be particularly useful when considering the impact on student achievement this year in the context of the University's degree outcomes statement, within which the results of 2020 might be considered. Due care and attention to student performance and sensitivity to needs and anxieties was indicative in the paperwork from the SEBS. Furthermore the external examiners' comments and responses from Schools to date to the issues that have arisen this year displayed depth of consideration from each.

Although the no detriment policy has been reassuring in not placing students at an unfair academic disadvantage, it is inevitable that some students may have benefitted and may progress at a higher level than usual and that they still might struggle throughout the next academic year. It would be sensible if Schools can give due consideration to any additional support for and monitoring of these students. A number of HEIs are actively surveying students about their experience of on-line assessment and any online teaching they may have experience in order to learn from it and strengthen the approach.

I was reassured that rises in levels of degree outcomes were largely well contained and understood but would advise some further contextualisation for external examiners so that they fully appreciate the extent of the supportive approach undertaken to ensure students are able to achieve and fulfil potential


There were only a few instances where PSRB requirements were brought into consideration and I would advise that these are more clearly indicated in the paperwork so that it is evident how the University and Schools have engaged with these requirements and ensured that learning outcomes and professional requirements have been sustained. If not possible for 2020, I would welcome both an institutional and School view of historic progression and award data at discipline level as well as more granulated breakdown of achievements by gender, ethnicity, disability, WP etc.... and perhaps a clearer understanding of the impact on student performance in semester A as opposed to Semester B in more systematic fashion. This might enable the University to respond in a more targeted manner to particular student needs in terms of support and address some of the specific comments that external examiners made in respect of the potential for some groups of students to suffer greater detriment as a result of CV19 (see comments in English and also Geography in particular)

As previously mentioned, it would be interesting to reflect how the University might articulate the outcomes for 2020 in the context of its Degree outcomes statement and for the consideration of its academic and corporate governance bodies ahead of any potential reporting to OfS in this respect. Acknowledging that the DfE and OfS have concerns about the impact of 'grade inflation', having a clear understanding of where and how this has occurred but supported by the evidence of the robust application of regulations and procedures will be critical

External examiners, particularly in HSS, made many positive comments on the standard of student work and also, across the university on the innovative teaching and assessment utilised to test how well students met learning outcomes. It would be positive step to make sure that these instances of good practice are highlighted and acted upon as methodically as those comments indicating areas for improvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in these well run and well evidenced proceedings.

Signed:



Date: 27 July 2020

Thank you for completing this report and for your contribution to assuring standards and quality at Queen Mary, University of London. Please return your report to the address/e-mail address given on the front page of this pro-forma. You will receive acknowledgement of the receipt of your report from the Academic Secretariat.

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**Redacted minutes of the UG Humanities and Social
Sciences DEB (24 July 2020)**

Undergraduate Humanities and Social Sciences Degree Examination Board Minutes of a meeting held on 24 July 2020

Members present

Professor Catherine Nash (Chair)		
Dr Stephen Allen	Professor Lisa Belyea	Professor Liam Campling
Dr Patrick Diamond	Dr Simon Layton	Professor Catherine Maxwell
Maureen McLaughlin (External)	Professor Leigh Oakes	Dr Elke Schwarz
Dr Luigi Ventimiglia	Richard Walters	Dr Martin Welton
Dr Mark Williams		

In attendance

Omowunmi Adebambo	Tessa Cornell	Alice de Havillan
Simon Hayter (Secretary)	Ross Kelsey	Matt Latham
Trudy Mason	Helen Murray	Pranay Olivier
Jane Pallant	Michelle Payne	Emma Shapcott
Victoria Wood		

Apologies

Claire Cooper	Professor Caoimhe McAvinchey	Claire Miller-Bersoullé
Professor Kathryn Richardson	Dr Geoffrey Roger	

Welcome and introductions

2019.1.a The Chair welcomed the Board and thanked members for all of their work in 2019/20. Particular thanks were extended to all who had worked to support students and keep processes running, especially examination board chairs and professional services staff who had been central in responding to the impact of the coronavirus and industrial action. The Chair extended particular thanks to Christina Perry, Dean for Education, who had been Acting DEB Chair in semester two.

Confidentiality, quorum, and declaration of interests

2019.2 The Board **noted** the confidential nature of its papers, discussions and decisions, and confirmed that it met the requirements for the quorum and that there were no potential conflicts of interest that could affect decision-making.

Debtors

2019.3 The Board **noted** that students with University Fee debts were not entitled to receive formal confirmation of decisions on progression or award. A student seeking to make a subject access request for that information could contact data-protection@qmul.ac.uk.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2019.4 The Board **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2019 without amendment. These included a record of decisions taken between the two meetings by Chair's action.

Mitigation of the impact of the coronavirus

2019.5 The Board **considered** the arrangements that Queen Mary had put in place to mitigate against the impact of the coronavirus, and noted the document 'Assessment, Progression, and Award 2019-20', which described the changes made to protect students and standards. These had included:

- ◆ changes to assessment schemes:
 - ◆ reducing the number of assessments while still testing all learning outcomes.
 - ◆ changing assessments into formats that could be delivered remotely.
- ◆ changes to the minimum standards for double-marking/moderation.
- ◆ changes to the minimum standards for use of external examiners.
- ◆ changes to minimum standards for award (reverting to pre-2015/16 regulations).
- ◆ the lowest 30 credits of 2019/20 marks were excluded from the year average mark.
- ◆ the zone of consideration for borderline cases was expanded from 1% to 1.5%, and students needed 45 rather than 60 credits at the higher level to be raised into the next classification banding.
- ◆ all students who did not submit were given automatic certified absences, and the fit to sit policy was relaxed slightly.
- ◆ SEBs were asked to complete module impact reports to monitor and record the effects on each module and the measures taken to mitigate those effects.

- 2019.5.a The Board **noted** a general consensus that these measures had been appropriate in the unusual circumstances of 2019/20. This view was echoed by most external examiners, in their comments at the SEBs.
- 2019.5.b The Board **noted** a concern from some SEBs that the contingency measures had given a disproportionate benefit to students who were not suffering particular hardships and who were able to use the measures strategically, and that some of the least advantaged students had not gained the same benefits.
- 2019.5.b.i The Board **noted** the difficulties of developing measures that were applicable to all students (which it was agreed was necessary) without having differential impacts, as it was not always possible to predict the effect on individual students. The measures had been designed to give all students the greatest possible opportunity to achieve success; in cases where a student's circumstances had meant that they could not achieve the minimum standards for award in 2020, the student had the opportunity to take assessments under the same conditions at the next opportunity in order to meet that threshold.
- 2019.5.b.ii The Board **noted** that, while broadly satisfied with the arrangements, it was keen to know more about the impact on different groups of students, in particular as an EDI issue. It agreed to refer the matter to the Vice-Principal (Education) and the Planning Office, noting that the most appropriate time for review would be after the late summer boards when more students had completed the year. The External Member supported this approach, and noted that the University of Warwick would be undertaking a similar review.
The Vice-Principal (Education) agreed that this would form a discussion item at the September 2020 meeting of the Education Quality and Standards Board.
- 2019.5.b.iii The Board **noted** a query from one SEB on the Student Hardship Fund. Despite the known issues with digital poverty and clear signposting and active encouragement of students to use the fund to acquire laptops and other necessary hardware, very few had done so. It was queried whether the fund was perhaps difficult to access, or if the questions were seen as intrusive.
The Secretary learned that a review of the Student Hardship Fund had already been commissioned, and submitted the Board's comments for inclusion in that review.
- 2019.5.c The Board **noted** a specific concern from two SEBs in one school over the intersection of the contingency arrangements with the late submission policy. A student who submitted work late was subject to the fit to sit policy and the work would be marked as usual in line with the late submission penalty policy. The SEBs asked whether this was equitable given the other procedures put in place for extenuating circumstances, and felt that students might appeal those penalties.

- 2019.5.c.i The Board **noted** that all students had been given an automatic two-week extension, that students who could not submit for the later deadline would receive an automatic certified absence, and that students who had submitted had been able to withdraw the work prior to receiving feedback in order to receive a first sit instead. Students experiencing particular circumstances that might warrant consideration beyond those measures had been expected to submit individual claims as usual, as a blanket rule on waiving late work penalties would have meant that there was no real deadline for submissions. The general consensus of the Board was satisfied with the provisions, and The External Member noted her agreement that it was reasonable to expect students to let the institution know if they had circumstances that went beyond those assumed for all students in 2020.
- 2019.5.d The Board **noted** that there had been a general uplift in results and degree classifications in 2019/20, and that this was likely to be attributable in part to the contingency measures. Comments from SEB external examiners indicated that this was the case in most institutions.
- 2019.5.d.i The Board **noted** that some externals had queried the inclusion of semester one modules within the contingency arrangements for discounting, and also the inclusion of dissertation/project modules (which still had to be passed where they were core, but the mark could be excluded). The Board was overall satisfied that Queen Mary had taken a transparent, fair and robust approach that sought to protect both students and academic standards. Feedback from SEBs and externals would be used to inform discussions and refine the arrangements should another situation occur in which such extraordinary measures were required.

Industrial action

- 2019.6 The Board **noted** that there had been industrial action at Queen Mary prior to the coronavirus outbreak, with an impact on the delivery of teaching and assessment for some SEBs. Each SEB had taken appropriate measures to mitigate the impact on the student experience as far as possible, and the SEB Chairs commented on their individual arrangements in their reports. The module impact reports also covered the impact of industrial action in many cases.
- 2019.6.a The Board **noted** that students were likely to conflate the impact of the industrial action (which was partly within Queen Mary's control) with that of the coronavirus (which was not). There was likely to be an increase in complaints and an impact on the results of the next National Student Survey, particularly given that this cohort had experienced the impact of industrial action in multiple years.

Drama Subject Examination Board

- 2019.7 The Board **considered** the report of the Drama Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Martin Welton.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.7.f The Board **noted** that the SEB's procedures had been relatively straightforward in 2019/20 despite the extraordinary circumstances, which was a testament to the professional services team.
- 2019.7.g The Board **noted** that the School of English and Drama had established an Education Group to manage mitigations and communications with staff and students during both the industrial action and the coronavirus. This had gone well.
- 2019.7.h The Board **noted** the SEB's view that the Queen Mary contingency arrangements for the coronavirus had been just and useful. While the SEB had wondered whether the revised borderline policy was perhaps slightly generous, it was very difficult to tell and a number of students who had previously been performing at a lower level had produced exemplary work at the higher standard during lockdown. All module organisers had completed impact reports, and the SEB Chair had

reviewed these and written a summary report; once the mitigations had been taken into account there were no divergences that could be clearly attributed to the impact of the coronavirus rather than normal variation between students and cohorts. Feedback from external examiners had been positive. The SEB noted its support for a review of Queen Mary's approach with a focus on EDI issues, as discussed above.

Language Centre Subject Examination Board

2019.8 The Board **considered** the report of the Language Centre Subject Examination Board, presented by Simon Hayter. The results of this SEB, which offered foundation programmes, had been approved by Chair's action as the students had required their outcomes earlier for visa purposes. The SEB's results and submissions were noted, but only one student required active consideration.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Politics and International Relations Subject Examination Board

2019.9 The Board **considered** the report of the Politics and International Relations Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Patrick Diamond.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.9.e The Board **noted** that the SPIR SEB had made a number of changes in 2019/20, in line with Queen Mary guidance, to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus. The use of take-home examinations had been a significant change for the SEB, but these had generally gone well. The SEB had been concerned about a possible increase in academic misconduct, but had actually seen a reduction in cases. There had also been concerns over whether the assessment format – open book with extended completion times – was insufficiently discriminatory to allow students to distinguish themselves among the cohort, but this had not proved to be the case. There had been some practical issues with hardware and broadband access, but overall the SEB had seen higher participation rates than for the equivalent examinations in previous years.

2019.9.f The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had been very positive, and described the SEB's assessments and procedures as robust and supported by clear guidance and communications from the School and Queen Mary that allowed swift and effective action. The SEB felt that this had allowed it to respond quickly and meaningfully to students, and feedback from the majority of students indicated that this had been effective in supporting them during a difficult year. The role of the SEB's professional services team in this work was particularly commended.

Geography Subject Examination Board

2019.10 The Board **considered** the report of the Geography Subject Examination Board, presented by Professor Lisa Belyea.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.10.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had applied the standard institutional contingency measures. The SEB had some concerns that these had not been as discriminatory as might have been desirable, and that they had unduly advantaged students who had suffered limited impact from the coronavirus while not providing additional redress for those with severe and long-term personal circumstances. While the SEB accepted the recommendations and noted the difficulties in developing an institutional policy that was both standardised and nuanced, it was suggested that these reflections should be considered in any review of 2019/20, as discussed [above](#).

- 2019.10.h The Board **noted** that the SEB had made changes to assessment schemes to mitigate the impact of industrial action and of the coronavirus. Geography had particularly diverse methods of teaching and assessment, including fieldwork, laboratory work, and geospatial analysis in computer laboratories. The SEB expressed particular thanks to colleagues in IT who had made rapid changes to support students in using alternative materials and technologies, and to the professional services team in Geography for their excellent work in keeping everything on track.
- 2019.10.i The Board **noted** that all of the SEB's module organisers had completed module impact reports, and conducted analysis on data from previous years set against the 2019/20 results. This had been challenging as the number of non-submissions had skewed the data for mean marks, but median marks had been helpful in the review and were within the expectations for normal annual variation. Submission rates had been low for some semester B modules, and it was felt that some students had used the contingency arrangements strategically.
- 2019.10.j The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had felt that the SEB had done all it could to support students this year, and that the contingency arrangements were sensible and broadly in line with those of other institutions. The externals did query whether discounting dissertations and semester A modules was perhaps somewhat generous, and the BA external raised some concerns over the high proportion of Firsts issued this year (discussed [above](#), as this applied to many schools and, reportedly, most institutions). The SEB had responded that a fuller review would be conducted after the late summer board, when more students had completed, but that an increase was expected and 2019/20 would be an unusual year.

Business and Management Subject Examination Board

- 2019.11 The Board **considered** the report of the Business and Management Subject Examination Board, presented by Professor Liam Campling.
- REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)*
- [Discussion items](#)
- 2019.11.e The Board **considered** the following points, raised by the Subject Examination Board:
- 2019.11.f The Board **noted** the SEB's thanks to the SBM professional services team, who had provided fantastic support for students and the SEB while working under very challenging conditions.
- 2019.11.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had made a very large number of amendments to its assessment schemes, and the SEB Chair had met with each module organiser to discuss those in detail, and impact reports had been completed for each module. The SEB had produced guidance for students on how to complete the alternative assessments, which had been well-received. The SEB had principally used take-home assignments with long submission dates, but had also run a number of timed examinations; Queen Mary's general position had been that these should be avoided where possible because of EDI concerns, but in some cases (as here) this was not possible due to the nature of the material being assessed. The SEB had run the exams as three-hour blocks *within* a 24-hour period, with multiple start-times to allow for students' personal circumstances and for different time zones. While the SEB had anticipated a sharp increase in claims for extenuating circumstances here, there were almost none when compared to other modules. This was particularly notable as the SEB had seen a 377 per cent increase in claims overall in 2019/20, and was perhaps attributable to students being more familiar with the format and thus more comfortable taking the assessments. The SEB recognised that online examinations (of any duration) posed issues around the potential for collusion, impersonation, and plagiarism, and had discussed this at length. The SEB's PSRBs had also reviewed the issue, and one had insisted that students on the accredited route sit the exam in the first three-hour block, to minimise the potential for academic misconduct.
- 2019.11.h The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had been impressed with the assessment procedures in SBM, and in particular with the range of different assessments in use. Some concerns

were raised over the high proportion of First Class awards and of the proportion of high marks awarded. While this was partly attributable to the coronavirus contingency measures, similar concerns had been raised in 2019, and while the externals had been satisfied at the time that this was due to an exceptional cohort, there were some concerns that a similar pattern had emerged for a second year. The externals suggested that the SEB should review its assessments and marking practices to ensure that these stretched the abilities of a range of students to allow additional discrimination between performances, to avoid over-marking, and to ensure that all assessments were set at the appropriate level. It was noted that some of these issues would have been exacerbated by the contingency arrangements. The SEB broadly accepted these comments, and in response had established a dedicated task group to review the issues during 2020-21, led by the Deputy SEB Chair. This would include the expanded use of moderation beyond the minimum Queen Mary requirements, with every assessment moderated by 'buddy' who worked with the module organiser across multiple years to permit longitudinal review of marks and outcomes. The SEB would also develop a common marking scheme (with increased discrimination) for all of the SEB's assessments.

English Subject Examination Board

2019.12 The Board **considered** the report of the English Subject Examination Board, presented by Professor Catherine Maxwell.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.12.e The Board **noted** the SEB's sincere thanks to the SED Teaching and Student Support Manager and to the School's professional services team for their fantastic work in supporting students and preparing for the boards.

2019.12.f The Board **noted** that all module organisers had completed impact reports and that these had been reviewed, with the conclusion that in almost all cases there was no significant observable impact on mean and median module marks bearing in mind the number of non-submissions this year. In the nine cases where there was a difference, it was concluded that this was not a cause for concern and that the variation was a justifiable result of the quality of work. The SEB had observed a notable increase in the standard of many submissions during this period and was content that the marks awarded were fully justified, as were the external examiners.

2019.12.g The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had been very positive, and had commended in particular the breadth and diversity of assessment and teaching in English. They had approved of the use of moderation, which had been in widespread use for the first time this year in English (rather than double marking), but had made suggestions for how the process might be refined for future years. The externals had found some of the practical contingency measures – such as electronic file sharing – to be helpful, and the SEB would continue with these in the future. The externals had also commented on the status of the late submission penalty as it related to the overall contingency measures, which was discussed [earlier in the meeting](#).

Languages, Linguistics and Film Subject Examination Board

2019.13 The Board **considered** the report of the Languages, Linguistics and Film Subject Examination Board, presented by Professor Leigh Oakes.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.13.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had applied the approved Queen Mary contingency measures. The SEB had some concerns over whether these had been overgenerous, particularly with respect to the amended borderline policy, and would have liked to see the College Mark both with and without

discounting applied. In some cases, students with no year average marks at the higher level had attained the higher classification. 14 students who would not have achieved a First under the standard regulations had done so under the contingency arrangements, and this number was likely to increase after the late summer assessments.

- 2019.13.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had made changes to assessment schemes and submission deadlines in many cases. The SEB had felt that the Queen Mary guidance was initially somewhat slow and contradictory. Ultimately the review had been successful, and the SEB had found it helpful in reconsidering which assessments were necessary for future years, as a way to avoid over-assessment.
- 2019.13.h The Board **noted** that the SEB had provided FAQs to students to help with effective assessment techniques. The SEB was also maintaining communications with students, including non-finalists who were progressing where they would not normally have been able to do so. There was a concern that these students could be overburdened, and the importance of advising these students so that they could take an informed decision on whether to progress or to resit out of attendance was emphasised by the SEB.
- 2019.13.i The Board **noted** that the SEB had made use of double-marking/moderation and external examiners largely in line with the standard policy rather than the contingency arrangements, but there had been a small number of exceptions, notably language assessments, where that had not been possible. In those cases the SEB had used the BI tool to provide supplementary data; this had proved helpful, although some limitations – notably the inclusion of zero marks for certified absences within mean module marks – were noted.
Secretary's note: the issue with certified absence marks has been reported to the BI team.
- 2019.13.j The Board **noted** that the SEB had 15 external examiners, and consequently had received a range of feedback. The alternative assessments had been well received, and the externals were satisfied that students had not been disadvantaged – some considered that perhaps the arrangements had been a little generous. Some externals had also commented on the marking schemes in use in SLLF, and on a need for greater consistency of approach to use of the full range of marks between the SEB's seven sub-boards. The SEB was reviewing this issue and reconsidering the grade divisions and grade descriptors.

Economics and Finance Subject Examination Board

- 2019.14 The Board **considered** the report of the Economics and Finance Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Luigi Ventimiglia.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.14.d The Board **noted** that the SEB had analysed its results, and found no rise in marks that was statistically significant. Assessments had been double-marked as they would have been in a usual year.
- 2019.14.e The Board **noted** that the SEB had used limited-time examinations with multiple start-points in a 24-hour period, in the same way as Business and Management, and had found that this worked well. The SEB had also run trial examinations so that students could become familiar with the online assessment format – the Board commended that approach as an example of good practice.

History Subject Examination Board

- 2019.15 The Board **considered** the report of the History Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Simon Layton.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.15.e The Board **noted** that – like other SEBs – History had seen an increase in First Class and Upper Second Class classifications. While this was partly due to the contingency arrangements, analysis also showed that the SEB’s initiatives to address attainment gaps were showing results. In particular, more female BAME students had attained First Class awards. The SEB had made considerable changes to the curriculum to make it more diverse and less Euro-centric; the SEB’s external examiners had particularly commended this work. The SEB and its externals had noted a desire for greater granularity in exam board reports to enable tracking of different student groups and their outcomes, and it was noted that the BI would provide much of this functionality.
- 2019.15.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had raised concerns over the cost and accessibility of medical evidence for students (outside of the coronavirus contingency measures). It was noted that Queen Mary would pilot limited self-certification in 2020-21, which would go some way towards addressing that issue (see [below](#)). The SEB also noted a desire for greater clarity on distinctions between chronic conditions and acute episodes in the policy, particularly given the exacerbating effect of the coronavirus on students with long-term conditions in 2020.
- 2019.15.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had used the revised minimum standards for double-marking/moderation and external examining for the majority of modules. Externals had seen five-year module averages and grade distributions rather than sampling work this year. Some of the SEB’s external examiners had suggested that they could have been used more, this year. The Head of the School of History had defended the approach taken. It was noted that all SEBs would return to Queen Mary’s standard procedures for 2020-21.

University of London in Paris (ULIP) Subject Examination Board

- 2019.16 The Board **considered** the report of the University of London in Paris (ULIP) Subject Examination Board, presented by Simon Hayter.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Law Subject Examination Board

- 2019.17 The Board **considered** the report of the Law Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Stephen Allen. Law was joining the Board for the first time in 2019/20, and the Chair welcomed the SEB. Law programmes followed substantially different regulations to other bachelors degrees and did not classify using the College Mark or the standard borderline conventions; instead, classification was based on the profile of grades (rather than marks) in the second and final developmental years.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.17.e The Board **noted** that the Law SEB had been supported by two departmental subcommittees that had been constituted to respond to the impact of the coronavirus and to the industrial action. Together, the groups had supported module organisers in taking actions in line with the Queen Mary guidance. Student performance in 2019/20 had been as good as or slightly better than in previous years.
- 2019.17.f The Board **noted** that the Law SEB had applied its usual marking and review processes in most cases, except that these had been conducted online. The external examiners had been complimentary on the SEB’s approach, but had noted that QMplus was somewhat cumbersome to navigate and that online marking had workload implications for staff.

2019.17.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had made plans for 2020-21, which would build on experiences from 2019-20. The SEB had experienced some issues with academic misconduct, and aimed to design-out student's ability to cheat and to educate students in proper academic conduct.

2019.17.h The Board **noted** that the LLB would adopt the common BA/BSc progression and award regulations from 2020-21 entry. This was a very considerable change, and had also required a full review of marking criteria and practices to ensure that the full range of marks was used consistently (under the current regulations only the letter grades were significant, so there was no practical difference between 70 and 100 for the purpose of classification – that would change, with the adoption of the College Mark). The Board wished the SEB success with the change and offered support in the process wherever this would be helpful.

Assessment arrangements for 2020-21

2019.18 The Board **noted** that in 2020-21 Queen Mary would return to the standard procedures, sample-sizes, and quality assurance requirements for double-marking/moderation and use of external examiners. Although there would still be a significant impact from the coronavirus in 2020-21, amendments to modules prior to the start of the year meant that a proactive approach was possible, rather than having to react and rapidly adapt assessment schemes not originally designed to be completed remotely, as had been the case in 2019-20. Should the national situation change and force further changes to delivery, the university would make additional arrangements as necessary and communicate with the Subject and Degree Examination Boards at the earliest opportunity.

Academic Regulations 2020-21

2019.19 The Board **noted** that there would be three significant changes to the Academic Regulations for 2020-21:

- ♦ the undergraduate Law programmes would adopt the common BA/BSc regulations for progression and award as discussed [above](#).
- ♦ CertHE and DipHE exit awards would in future be classified (Pass/Merit/Distinction, rather than simply Pass) for students on 2020-21 and later regulations.
- ♦ limited self-certification would be permitted for extenuating circumstances. Each student would be able to self-certify on three occasions per year. This could cover multiple assessments on each occasion, if they fell within the affected period. Self-certification did not equal automatic approval – SEBs would consider claims as usual, and would need to be satisfied that the claim was appropriate and that the desired outcome was proportionate.

External Member's report

2019.20 The Board **considered** comments from the External Member, Maureen McLaughlin (University of Warwick), noting that a full written report would also be submitted.

- ♦ the External Member thanked the Board for an illuminating and helpful meeting.
- ♦ the paperwork was described as exemplary and thorough. It had been helpful to see this in advance, with sight of the module impact reports.
- ♦ Queen Mary and the Board had made comprehensive contingency arrangements and had put great effort into reviewing the impact on individual students. The Board's earlier discussions on relative impact and EDI were noted, and it was observed that it was very difficult to create a common and fair system that also took into account individual circumstances, particularly where these might not have been disclosed. The review exercise was supported, but the External Member was satisfied that the arrangements had been appropriate and proportionate, and commended colleagues on delivering positive innovations as a response to the crisis.
- ♦ Queen Mary had, in common with most other institutions, seen an increase in 'good honours' outcomes in 2019/20. The External Member was satisfied that the outcomes had been appropriate, but Queen Mary would – like all institutions – need to be able to defend those

outcomes to any queries from internal and external reviewers and bodies (eg Council and the OfS). The module impact reports and contingency documentation would play an important role in this.

- ♦ the detailed responses from SEBs to comments – positive and negative – from their external examiners was admirable. It was also good to see that Queen Mary employed external examiners from a broad range of institutions, to provide a wide array of experience.

Authority for the Chair to act on behalf of the Board

2019.21 The Board **approved** the conferral of authority to the Chair, to act upon its behalf.

Closing remarks

2019.22 The Chair **noted** again thanks to the Board for what it and Queen Mary's students had achieved in 2019-20 under such difficult circumstances, and wished all members well for the year ahead.

Summary of Chair's actions taken after the meeting

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

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**Redacted minutes of the UG Science & Engineering DEB
(24 July 2020)**

Undergraduate Science and Engineering Degree Examination Board Minutes of a meeting held on 24 July 2020

Members present

Professor Henri Huijberts (Chair)

Dr Hicham Adjali

Dr Marcella Bona

Dr Chris Faulkes

Dr Richard Grose

Professor Lucinda Hall

Dr Greg Michael

Dr Shirley Wang

Dr Yasir Alfadhl

Dr Sadani Cooray

Dr Matt Fayers

Dr Himadri Gupta

Professor Pasquale Malacaria

Dr Fariborz Motallebi

Dr Emiliano Bilotti

Dr Christoph Engl

Dr Arianna Fornili

Dr Peter King

Maureen McLaughlin (External)

Dr Arick Shao

In attendance

Tessa Cornell

Alice de Havillan

Sarahlouise Lawrence

Daniella Peluso-White

Jennifer Suleiman Andrés

Sandra Dias

Simon Hayter (Secretary)

Trudy Mason

Simon Rawstron

Gary Welch

Karen Finesilver

Pooja Kanani

Jane Pallant

Ken Shuttleworth

Chelsea Zhang-Anegbeh

Apologies

Dr Giulia de Falco

Dr Peter Wyatt

Dr Steffi Krause

Dr Sophie Pettit

Welcome and introductions

2019.1 The Chair welcomed the Board and thanked members for all of their work in 2019/20. Especial thanks were extended to all who had worked to support students and keep processes running while responding to the impact of the coronavirus and industrial action, especially examination board chairs and professional services staff. The Chair extended a particular welcome to Maureen McLaughlin, Director of Education Policy & Quality at the University of Warwick, who had joined the Board as its External Member.

Confidentiality, quorum, and declaration of interests

2019.2 The Board **noted** the confidential nature of its papers, discussions and decisions, and confirmed that it met the requirements for the quorum and that there were no potential conflicts of interest that could affect decision-making.

Debtors

2019.3 The Board **noted** that a student with University Fee debts would not be entitled to receive formal confirmation of decisions on progression or award. A student seeking to make a subject access request for that information could contact data-protection@qmul.ac.uk.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2019.4 The Board **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2019 without amendment. These included a record of decisions taken between the two meetings by Chair's action.

2019.5 The Board **considered** the arrangements that Queen Mary had put in place to mitigate against the impact of the coronavirus, and noted the document 'Assessment, Progression, and Award 2019-20', which described the changes made to protect students and standards. These had included:

- ◆ changes to assessment schemes:
 - ◆ reducing the number of assessments while still testing all learning outcomes.
 - ◆ changing assessments into formats that could be delivered remotely.
- ◆ changes to the minimum standards for double-marking/moderation.
- ◆ changes to the minimum standards for use of external examiners.
- ◆ changes to minimum standards for award (reverting to pre-2015/16 regulations).
- ◆ the lowest 30 credits of 2019/20 marks were excluded from the year average mark.
- ◆ the zone of consideration for borderline cases was expanded from 1% to 1.5%, and students needed 45 rather than 60 credits at the higher level to be raised into the next classification banding.
- ◆ all students who did not submit were given automatic certified absences, and the fit to sit policy was relaxed slightly.
- ◆ SEBs were asked to complete module impact reports to monitor and record the effects on each module and the measures taken to mitigate those effects.

Industrial action

2019.6 The Board **noted** that there had been industrial action at Queen Mary prior to the coronavirus outbreak, with an impact on the delivery of teaching and assessment for some SEBs. Each SEB had taken appropriate measures to mitigate the impact on the student experience, and commented on these arrangements in their reports. The module impact reports also covered the impact of industrial action in many cases.

Mathematical Sciences Subject Examination Board

2019.7 The Board **considered** the report of the Mathematical Sciences Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Matt Fayers.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.7.f The Board **noted** that there had been substantial issues in the delivery of MTH6115 Cryptography in 2019-20 (semester A). Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, a suspension of regulations had been approved to discount the MTH6115 mark from classification where it would bring down the College Mark. This was in addition to the discounting of the 30 credits with the poorest marks for all students in 2019/20. The SEB had made arrangements for changes to the delivery for future years.
- 2019.7.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had identified a significant number of cases in which collusion was suspected in examinations delivered online in 2019/20 as a result of the coronavirus. These students' records had been placed on hold pending investigation.
- 2019.7.h The Board **noted** that the SEB had seen an increase in the award of First Class degrees in 2019-20, and that this pattern was replicated across the majority of SEBs (and DEBs). The SEB attributed this in part to Queen Mary's regulatory amendments including mark discounting, but also to the use of 24-hour open book online assessments. In a notable example, the Institute of Actuaries had required that students on accredited programmes had no more than three hours to complete an examination; the SEB had allowed the affected students to make two submissions – one after three hours for the PSRB's purposes, and another within the 24-hour period if they chose to do so, for Queen Mary's purposes. The SEB had seen a significant increase in the average mark achieved for the second submissions when set against the first. There had been little alternative to the 24-hour approach in 2019-20 due to the timeframes involved, but the SEB would consider alternative approaches to online assessment for 2020-21.
- 2019.7.i The Board **noted** that the Mathematical Sciences external examiners had been satisfied that had acted appropriately and done all that it could to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on students and standards. The externals had noted the increase in First Class outcomes, but observed that this pattern would be replicated at many institutions and that 2020-21 would be an exceptional year.

There had been some discussion of scaling results down, but Queen Mary policy had been not to do so as the marks achieved were appropriate for the amended assessment formats; any perceived issue sat with the assessment format rather than with the students. The externals had accepted this position.

- 2019.7.j The Board **noted** the SEB's thanks to all colleagues in the School of Mathematical Sciences, ARCS, and other departments at Queen Mary who had ensured the delivery of the usual processes and outcomes under difficult conditions this year.

Physics and Astronomy Subject Examination Board

- 2019.8 The Board **considered** the report of the Physics and Astronomy Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Marcella Bona.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.8.d The Board **considered** the following points, raised by the Subject Examination Board:
- 2019.8.e The Board **noted** that Physics and Astronomy had made a number of changes to assessment and teaching delivery to mitigate the impact of industrial action and the coronavirus, and had set up a parallel workflow system to manage these changes. The revised assessments had been designed to be as close as possible to the original versions so that students did not feel alienated by a new format, and additional resources had been made available to students, including recordings from 2018-19 lectures alongside the 2019-20 materials. The SEB had retained the usual procedures for marking and review, but conducted them online. There were no significant procedural issues, though some individual students had reported technical difficulties and limitations, which had been responded to appropriately.
- 2019.8.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had seen an increase in mean module results since last year, with semester A modules rising by an average of two per cent and semester B by nine percent. The semester A increase was relatively consistent with expectations, and the SEB had observed no negative impact from the introduction of semester-based examinations. The semester B increase was attributed largely to the use of open-book examinations; the SEB had put control measures in place but it was difficult to measure the impact. A task group had been assembled to review assessment schemes for 2020-21 with the aim of designing out the more problematic elements of open-book assessment. The increase in module results had led to a slight rise in the award of First and Upper Second Class degrees, but this was not extreme in Physics and Astronomy.
- 2019.8.g The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had been happy with everything this year, including the contingency measures. The SEB had provided the externals with new online tools to see scripts, comments and marks, which had been well received. A request for a similar tool to look at results on a student-by-student basis was under consideration.

Psychology Subject Examination Board

- 2019.9 The Board **considered** the report of the Psychology Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Shirley Wang.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.9.d The Board **noted** that the Psychology SEB had been impacted by industrial action in 2019-20, but had been able to mitigate the impact through reasonable adjustments and amendments, including minor changes in assessment.

- 2019.9.e The Board **noted** that the SEB had made changes in line with the Queen Mary guidance to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus, including changes to assessment, and online delivery. The SEB's accrediting body, the BPS, had been understanding and accepting of the changes. Discussions with the BPS on 2020-21 provision, including blended learning and staff-student ratios, were ongoing.
- 2019.9.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had reviewed its classification and module marks in line with results from the past three years. Module results were broadly consistent, though there was some increase in the semester B modules, which was attributed in part to the open-book format. There had been a substantial increase in the award of First Class degrees, but the SEB noted that its externals had previously commented on the relatively low proportion awarded by Queen Mary in comparison to other institutions with comparable cohorts, and this had partly been an expected change following amendments to marking practices.
- 2019.9.g The Board **noted** that the Psychology external examiners had been happy with the marking procedures. The externals had commented on the use of assessments relating to participation, which tended to result in marks of either zero or 100. The SEB would review this for 2020-21, particularly in level six modules.

Biological Sciences Subject Examination Board

- 2019.10 The Board **considered** the report of the Biological Sciences Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Chris Faulkes.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.10.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had found average module marks in 2019-20 to be very consistent with those of past years, even where open-book assessment had been used. While there were exceptions, these were few in number and not greatly out of line. As in many SEBs, though, there had been an increase in the award of First Class degrees. The SEB's module organisers had completed impact reports to assess and mitigate against the impact of both industrial action and the coronavirus – assessment adjustments had been made where required. Students had engaged well with the assessments, which was pleasing as the SEB had expected many to opt-out and either defer or to rely on discounting under the contingency arrangements. The general standard of submissions had been high, with some exceptional work.
- 2019.10.g The Board **noted** that the Biological Sciences external examiners had been happy with the arrangements, and had recommended that the SEB use this as an opportunity to reflect more broadly on the volume and range of assessments in use for future years.

Biomedical Sciences Subject Examination Board

- 2019.11 The Board **considered** the report of the Biomedical Sciences Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Peter King.

Discussion items

- 2019.11.d The Board **noted** that the SEB had seen a similar pattern of results to other boards, with little increase in mean module outcomes but a more notable increase in the proportion of First and Upper Second Class outcomes, likely as a result of the contingency arrangements on discounting.
- 2019.11.e The Board **noted** that the SEB had moved its existing assessment arrangements online. Timed-essays had been used in most cases rather than open-book examinations, and there had been no evidence of academic misconduct. The SEB used synoptic assessment that tested knowledge and skill from across the curriculum, which made attempted misconduct very challenging.

2019.11.f The Board **noted** that the SEB's external examiners had been content with the arrangements, but had expressed some concern over the high number of First Class awards, while noting the unusual circumstances and the contingency arrangements. The externals had been satisfied with the marks and marking processes; in one case an external had queried the high marks on a Pharmacology and Innovative Therapeutics module, but the SEB had been able to justify the marks and noted that this programme attracted high-performing students and that the marks were appropriate. The externals and the SEB had also discussed appropriate volumes of assessment, and ensuring that students were not over-assessed.

Chemistry Subject Examination Board

2019.12 The Board **considered** the report of the Chemistry Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Arianna Fornili.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.12.e The Board **noted** that the SEB had not been impacted by industrial action in 2019-20. The Queen Mary arrangements had been put in place to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus on teaching and assessment. All modules had been migrated online for the final four weeks of teaching, and new question formats had been used to address the open-book aspect of the assessments. The SEB had used its usual marking practices in terms of quality assurance.

2019.12.f The Board **noted** that the SEB had compared semester A and B module results against those of previous years. There was an increase, but – as had been expected – this was more pronounced in some modules than in others. The Chemistry external examiners had generally been positive, and while they had noted the increase in First Class outcomes they had accepted this and commended the SEB for the way in which it handled assessment this year.

2019.12.g The Board **noted** that Chemistry continued to review its provision, and held weekly meetings to plan the delivery and assessment of content for 2020-21. Particular consideration would be given to whether the 48-hour window for examinations could be reduced.

Materials Science Subject Examination Board

2019.13 The Board **considered** the report of the Materials Science Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Emiliano Bilotti.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.13.d The Board **noted** that the Materials Science SEB had had similar experiences to other SEBs, with some increase in overall outcomes attributed primarily to the discounting provisions. The SEB would reflect on how to improve alternative assessments for 2020-21. There had been no impact from industrial action in Materials Science.

Engineering Subject Examination Board

2019.14 The Board **considered** the report of the Engineering Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Himadri Gupta.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

2019.14.f The Board **noted** the Engineering SEB's thanks to colleagues in resolving a number of mark queries in the run-up to the DEB.

- 2019.14.g The Board **noted** that the SEB had seen a similar pattern of results to other boards, with high marks but a normal distribution. Scaling had been applied in the second year module DEN6336. There had been some issues with academic misconduct, particularly in open-book examinations for Chemical Engineering. Discipline-specific groups had been established to review the assessments and to redesign for 2020-21 based on lessons learned in 2019-20. This would include a review of the provision of software licenses to students, to be better able to work remotely on their projects.
- 2019.14.h The Board **noted** that the Engineering external examiners had been somewhat critical, as unfortunately a technical issue with QMplus had meant that the system was down on the day of the SEB. The externals had also suggested that the meeting be held anonymously, though it was noted that Queen Mary's policies took account of anonymity elsewhere in the process and did permit SEBs to choose whether or not to run their meetings anonymously, given that little or no discretion remained at that stage of the process.
- 2019.14.i The Board **noted** that the SEB had attempted to engage with its PSRBs at an early stage. Most had been supportive and had accepted the mitigation arrangements in full. The Royal Aeronautical Society had sent a revised letter late in the process raising some additional points, but it had been too late to make further amendments at that stage. The External Member noted that her own institution had the same experience.

Electronic Engineering and Computer Science Subject Examination Board

- 2019.15 The Board **considered** the report of the Electronic Engineering and Computer Science Subject Examination Board, presented by Professor Pasquale Malacaria.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.15.e The Board **noted** that the EECS SEB had, like other boards, seen an increase in the proportion of First Class awards but also a commensurate reduction in 2As, so the overall proportion of so-called good honours degrees was almost unchanged. The SEB had reviewed the results of semester A and semester B modules, and seen a notable increase where open-book examinations had been used.
- 2019.15.f The Board **noted** that the EECS external examiners' comments had centred on the marking process, with recommendations for changes to the module reports, and for a review of funding to employ mark checkers (rather than having academic staff complete that task).

Global Health Subject Examination Board

- 2019.16 The Board **considered** the report of the Global Health Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Sadani Cooray.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.16.d The Board **noted** that the Global Health SEB had seen considerable disruption from industrial action, but relatively little from the coronavirus as most assessments were already coursework based. In both cases the SEB had made adjustments as required. The Global Health external examiners had commended the programme and deemed the contingency arrangements appropriate. The SEB would review its curriculum for 2020-21 with the aim of increasing the integration of subjects.

Intercalated Programmes Subject Examination Board

- 2019.17 The Board **considered** the report of the Intercalated Programmes Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Greg Michael.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.17.c The Board **noted** the Intercolated Programmes SEB's thanks to the teams responsible for its programmes and to ARCS for their support this year.
- 2019.17.d The Board **noted** that there had been an increase in First Class awards, but the SEB had not viewed this as problematic. The intercalated programmes were selective, and recruited only the strongest students – it was usual even in normal years for a majority of students to achieve the highest outcomes. The SEB's lead external examiner had also been happy with the results and expressed strong support for Queen Mary's contingency measures, which she felt had ensured that no students fell through the gaps.
- 2019.17.e The Board **noted** that the SEB and its sub-boards had made all necessary arrangements to mitigate the impact of the events of 2019-20. Only the Global Health programme had been affected by industrial action, and the programme team had made alternative arrangements. The coronavirus has impacted particularly on the Pre-Hospital Medicine route, where access to clinical data had been problematic, but the team had found workarounds. Pre-Hospital Medicine had also made use of one invigilated examination, with additional support in place for computer access. Module marks had been broadly consistent with those of previous years.
- 2019.17.f The Board **noted** that the SEB would deliver blended learning in 2020-21, with many clinical elements moved into semester two in the hope that more facilities would be open by that stage. The SEB was also taking the opportunity to review its portfolio, particularly in terms of how many electives were offered.

Science and Engineering Foundation Programme Subject Examination Board

- 2019.18 The Board **considered** the report of the Science and Engineering Foundation Programme Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Hicham Adjali.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.18.d The Board **noted** that the SEFP SEB followed a different structure to other boards, and was primarily concerned with progression. The results of modules that contributed to the programme were considered by the schools that delivered those modules, and the contingency arrangements were also made there. The SEB had seen a rise of around nine per cent in the award of Distinctions, but was satisfied that this was appropriate under the contingency arrangements. As in other SEBs, mean module marks and overall pass rates had been higher in semester B than in semester A.

Queen Mary-BUPT Joint Programmes Subject Examination Board

- 2019.19 The Board **considered** the report of the Queen Mary-BUPT Joint Programmes Subject Examination Board, presented by Dr Yasir Alfadhil. The main business of the SEB had been considered at an earlier meeting of the DEB, and this present meeting considered only cases that could not be resolved previously.

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

Discussion items

- 2019.19.b The Board **noted** that the majority of assessments had taken place in January 2020, so there had been less impact than other SEBs had experienced.

Assessment arrangements for 2020-21

2019.20 The Board **noted** that in 2020-21 Queen Mary would return to the standard procedures, sample-sizes, and quality assurance requirements for double-marking/moderation and use of external examiners. Although there would still be a significant impact from the coronavirus in 2020-21, amendments to modules prior to the start of the year meant that a proactive approach was possible, rather than having to react and rapidly adapt assessment schemes not originally designed to be completed remotely. Should the national situation change and force further changes to delivery, the university would make additional arrangements as necessary and communicate with the Subject and Degree Examination Boards at the earliest opportunity.

Academic Regulations 2020-21

2019.21 The Board **noted** that there would be three significant changes to the Academic Regulations for 2020-21:

- ◆ the undergraduate Law programmes would adopt the common BA/BSc/BEng regulations for progression and award.
- ◆ CertHE and DipHE exit awards would in future be classified (Pass/Merit/Distinction, rather than simply Pass) for students on 2020-21 and later regulations.
- ◆ limited self-certification would be permitted for extenuating circumstances. Each student would be able to self-certify on three occasions per year. This could cover multiple assessments on each occasion, if they fell within the affected period. Self-certification did not equal automatic approval – SEBs would consider claims as usual, and would need to be satisfied that the claim was appropriate and that the desired outcome was proportionate.

External Member's report

2019.22 The Board **considered** comments from the External Member, noting that a full written report would also be submitted.

- ◆ the External Member thanked the Board for an illuminating and helpful meeting, and extended particular thanks to those who had presented their reports. This had added to the understanding of the paperwork and how students and staff had been affected in real terms.
- ◆ the paperwork was described as exemplary and thorough. It had been helpful to see this in advance, with sight of the module impact reports. The analysis of results conducted by the SEBs was commended, and it was suggested that this might be built into the SEB submissions so that these data could be considered and compared in the round during the meeting.
- ◆ Queen Mary and the Board had made comprehensive contingency arrangements and had put great effort into reviewing the impact on individual students. The External Member was satisfied that the arrangements had been appropriate and proportionate, and commended colleagues on delivering positive innovations as a response to the crisis. Supporting students who had been automatically progressed would be a significant and important piece of work in 2020-21.
- ◆ Queen Mary had, in common with most other institutions, seen an increase in 'good honours' outcomes in 2019/20. The External Member was satisfied that the outcomes had been appropriate, but Queen Mary would – like all institutions – need to be able to defend those outcomes to any queries from internal and external reviewers and bodies (eg Council and the OfS). The module impact reports and contingency documentation would play an important role in this.
- ◆ the detailed responses from SEBs to comments – positive and negative – from their external examiners was admirable. It was also good to see that Queen Mary employed external examiners from a broad range of institutions, to provide a wide array of experience.

Authority for the Chair to act on behalf of the Board

2019.23 The Board **approved** the conferral of authority to the Chair, to act upon its behalf.

Closing remarks

2019.24 The Chair **noted** again thanks to the Board for what it and Queen Mary's students had achieved in 2019-20 under such difficult circumstances, and wished all members well for the year ahead.

Summary of Chair's actions taken after the meeting

REDACTED (this section detailed individual student cases)

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Lessons learned from the May/June alternative assessments

Lessons Learnt from May/June Alternative Assessments

Nimesh Patel and Ana Cabral

Background

The UK entered “lockdown” at the end of March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 emergency. This resulted in QMUL, much like other higher education institutions, to begin a process of moving learning activities online and consider reasonable alternatives to face-to-face assessments. Alternative assessments were recognised not to be quick fixes and would require considerable planning, training and activity from the university to support both staff and students.

As part of the Education 3.1 Assessment workstream a sub-group was created to investigate the lessons learnt from the alternative assessments. A short survey was developed to ask of those that were involved in development, delivery and marking of alternative assessments what format their assessment originally took and what alternative assessment was used followed by four key questions:

1. Please share your positive experiences of the alternative assessment format?
2. Please share your negative experiences of the alternative assessment format?
3. What would you change?
4. If you have received student feedback on the alternative assessments, please provide them below.

Results

Seventy-eight responses were received from across QMUL. A breakdown by faculty is provided below:

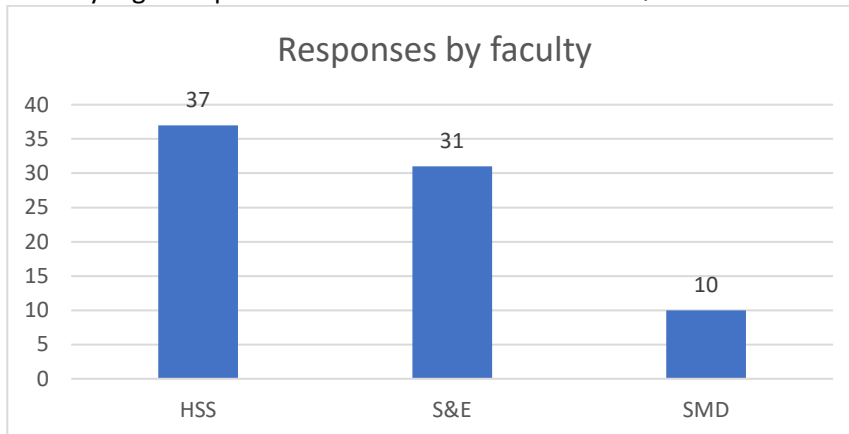


Figure 1: Responses received by faculty.

Predominantly, modules moved to an open-book exam or essay format:

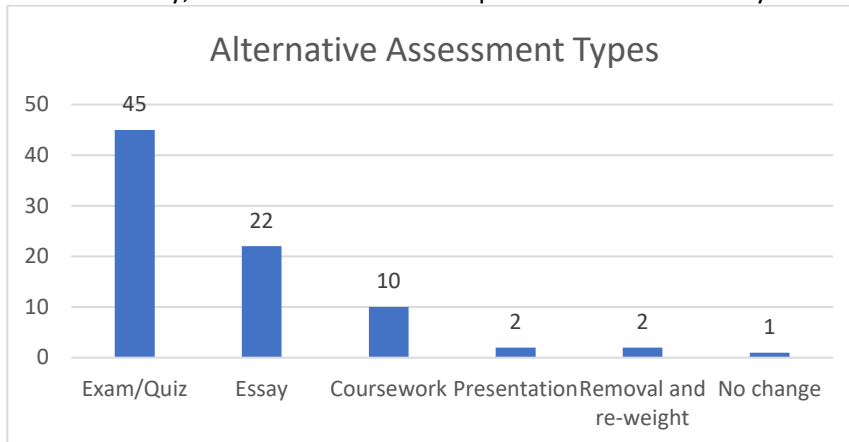


Figure 2: Alternative Assessment types adopted.

In most cases the essay component was previously a traditional sit-down exam which was converted to the suggested 24-48h time limit. In all cases except two, the alternative assessments were open-book and students were given a longer timeframe to complete the assessment. The exceptions were exams that were held under secure conditions with one held using the TopHat proctored solution and another using live invigilation on Microsoft Teams.

1. Positive experiences

Experiences of the alternative assessment method used ranged from nothing positive (22% of all responses) to being exceptionally positive. This appeared to be attributed to the type of assessment used and the content being assessed. Operationally the most common comments were related to ease of marking and less paper to carry. Educationally the key comments were *“The short word length forced students to get to the point and focus on the fundamentals of a good essay - e.g. good structure, reflecting a coherent argument, etc.”* and *“Questions are more adequate to assess students comprehension and format/style of questions is closer to real life situations.”*. Additionally, the comment that sums up the entire experience: *“It can work very well if the questions are designed carefully so that they can't be answered simply by regurgitating facts from lecture notes or the internet - best to ask them to make some very specific connections or to apply their understanding to a specific new problem. The best answers were excellent, and it was refreshing to have an assessment not dependent on rote learning. We found it worked as a way to assess different levels of understanding and engagement. I checked afterwards, and the best answers came from students I know to be excellent. We found no evidence of collusion and not much evidence of plagiarism.”*. A minority of modules saw no increase in average marks.

2. Negative experiences

Negative experiences were more varied amongst those that responded to the survey. Common themes arising from the comments were increased workload, QMplus not a suitable platform for delivery and marking inc for blind marking, students achieved higher scores overall due to reduced number of questions, the time window was too long, critical analysis skills are not assessed to the same extent, reduced engagement, question banks can become quickly depleted, and collusion and cheating.

For live invigilated examinations carried out remotely it would not be sustainable to carry out this activity on large cohorts with the current set-up, and proctoring proved successful for the one course that used it but increased anxiety in students due to the new format.

Finally, there was concern about how much module/programme leads had to do to get the changes implemented. The decision-making process of the alternative format was *“painfully slow”* with three levels of approval needed (SETL, Faculty, ARCS) with no interaction between the three levels. There needs to be a more *“streamlined approval process”*.

3. What could be changed?

A common issue raised was for more student and staff literacy in alternative assessments if this moved forward. There needs to be more sophisticated questioning to ensure the academic integrity of the degrees. Staff training would be paramount here. Although, there was a mixed response to remaining with alternative assessments and switching back to the normally scheduled assessment type. This is more likely to be a reflection of the type of content assessed but perhaps with better training resources for staff it may be possible to increase alternative assessment whilst retaining a minimal amount of traditional assessment format where necessary. This is clear where one comment was *“abolish the alternative assessments; they are not fit-for-purpose.”*.

Identified needs:

- review the timings used. Many responders commented that 24h was too long to complete the assessment – a window of say 2.5h in a 24-hour period may be an alternative approach.
- change lecture content to spend more time explaining *“concepts/techniques/research”* rather than *“material related to recall”*;
- invest in a platform that is fit for purpose (QMplus does not seem to be a suitable platform for delivery of alternative assessment);
- make all material that students might readily access physically in the library available online (although this might be redundant as students are returning to campus from September - should a second wave occur this does need to be considered);
- adjust templates for submission (one student did not answer all questions so it was unclear if they missed it or could not answer it);
- alter standards (such as a change to the grading scheme to take into account the open-book format).
- give more time to marking (as well as support for marking) and time to support students academically in the run up to the exams;
- introduce more in-term assessments to reduce burden at the end of term (would help distribute workload).

Other relevant comments/ suggestions:

- Many mentioned that take home assessments would become common practice in years to come and significant effort needs to be made to “minimize plagiarism”.
- Blind marking was regarded as a must (and must work both ways).
- Innovative suggestion: marking on tablets with a “pen” to allow markers to make comments on PDF scripts to minimise the “time consuming clicking methods”.

4. Student feedback

Of the 78 responders only 24 received feedback from students. The majority of comments have been “positive”. The alternative assessments were acceptable to the students as many expressed less pressure to revise in the current climate due to new pressures from home or inability to study due to lack of appropriate hardware or study space. Reassurance and communication from one School helped reduce anxiety of the new format. Having the 48h window was deemed to be stressful by students as they felt it necessary to check and recheck answers before submission. Some exams took longer than 3h and often couldn't be completed in a fixed 3h period as questions required more thought and in some instances were too open ended.

Experiences from remote invigilated exams was largely positive. Resit students acknowledged the fact that they were given the same opportunity as first sit students who sat a traditional exam. Those students that used the proctored solution felt the software was easy to use and the multiple opportunities to practice using the platform were helpful.

5. Recommendations:

- Encourage the adoption of **new methods of assessment** (where possible) but still give opportunity for traditional formats;
- Promote **flexibility** - as certain elements can only be assessed with certain methods (with change coming slowly).
- Provide appropriate **guidance** and **resources** for assessments;
- Allow module leads to have a more active role in **choosing the best form of assessment for their module** in consultation with programme leads;
- Identify an **appropriate platform for delivery** (QMplus does not seem to be an appropriate platform for assessments of this type);
- Have a **strategy for dealing with rapid changes to assessment** (at university level) should we encounter further issues down the line relating to Covid 19 or other scenarios (or least provide guidance on what to write in schemes for assessment to reduce the need to request changes via ARCS);
- Make **processes more agile** (more streamlined approval process);
- Create channels of **communication** at school level (provide reassurance and reduce pressure and anxiety);
- Promote the development of **staff and student literacy** in (alternative) assessments;
- Develop **training for staff** (alternative assessment tools and forms of questioning to ensure academic integrity).