

Complete guide to

Assessment boards

Department of Academic Quality (DAQ)

November 2020

This guide is intended to support all staff with a role at assessment boards. It is split into two sections; the first provides everything you need to know about assessment boards including roles and responsibilities and good practice. The second section focuses specifically on conducting assessment boards virtually and includes relevant guidance on online data security and technical support.

The guide should be read in conjunction with other related documents including the academic regulations, assessment and feedback policy, and external examining guide etc. For more information and access to additional resources, go to: dmu.ac.uk/assessment-boards-regulations.

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Section 1: Everything you need to know about assessment boards

Why do we have assessment boards?

Overall purpose

The formal assessment board has the following responsibilities for all programmes leading to named awards which are allocated to it:

- Accountable for academic integrity of assessment
- Verification and ratification of results
- Conduct of assessment including determining module marks, progression, and awards
- Ensuring compliance with university and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements including programme-specific regulations
- Arrangements and processes for module assessments, moderation, and reassessment

More specifically, each assessment board is responsible for confirming marks at module level, reviewing student performance at module and programme level, making decisions in relation to student progression between levels of study and recommending awards and degree classifications in all programmes leading to named awards which are allocated to the assessment board.

Establishment

Assessment boards are established by and within faculties, subject to the approval of the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC). They have the formal status of standing committees of the FAC and are subject to such standing orders as are determined by the Academic Board. It is the responsibility of each FAC annually to approve the membership for each assessment board and to determine that each assessment board is properly constituted, with a chair, deputy chair and external examiner(s). The name of the assessment board will be determined by the programme grouping(s) associated with the board, for example fine art assessment board.

Terms of reference

Working within university rules, regulations and protocols, each assessment board is responsible for:

- Arrangements and processes for module assessment and moderation, including draft examination papers, coursework assignments, project briefs, work experience programmes (where intrinsic to studies), schedules for submission of assessed work etc.
- The assessment of modules for which the board has responsibility and determining of module marks.
- Arrangements for the retrieval of failure.
- The application of university and programme regulations relating to progression and eligibility for reassessment.
- Reviewing, checking and approving assessment profiles leading to named awards and determining awards and degree classification for confirmation by the Executive Director of Student and Academic Services.
- Ensuring compliance with professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements, where appropriate.

- Making decisions regarding the suspension or ending of registration of students who do not meet progression or award requirements.

When do we have assessment boards?

Pre-board activity

Before we look at the optimum timing to schedule assessment boards, it is useful to understand all of the preceding work that needs to happen before the main board. The university mainly operates a single-tier assessment board structure, ratifying both module and programme-level results and decisions as one complete process. The assessment board process starts with a pre-board which normally takes place one week before the main assessment board. The pre-boards are an informal meeting in which key members from the subject/faculty review all the marks submitted (particularly borderline cases). The aim is to cleanse the data as much as possible to identify and address any inaccuracies or omissions, prior to the main board. There are a small number of subject areas that also conduct an informal module mark review at the beginning of the process, prior to the pre-board stage.

Key factors informing the scheduling of assessment boards

The assessment board schedule is informed by a series of university-wide key assessment dates, which serves to standardise the timing of certain activities such as exam periods, marking and moderation. Assessment boards (and pre-boards) should be scheduled at the optimum point of timeliness to confirm student results and make decisions regarding their individual progression and award status. Too early in the marking and moderation timeline and the results may be incomplete, resulting in more chairs' actions than ratifications. Too late, and students may not reassess, progress, or gain their award in a timely manner. When determining the optimum time for holding an assessment board, the following areas should be considered:

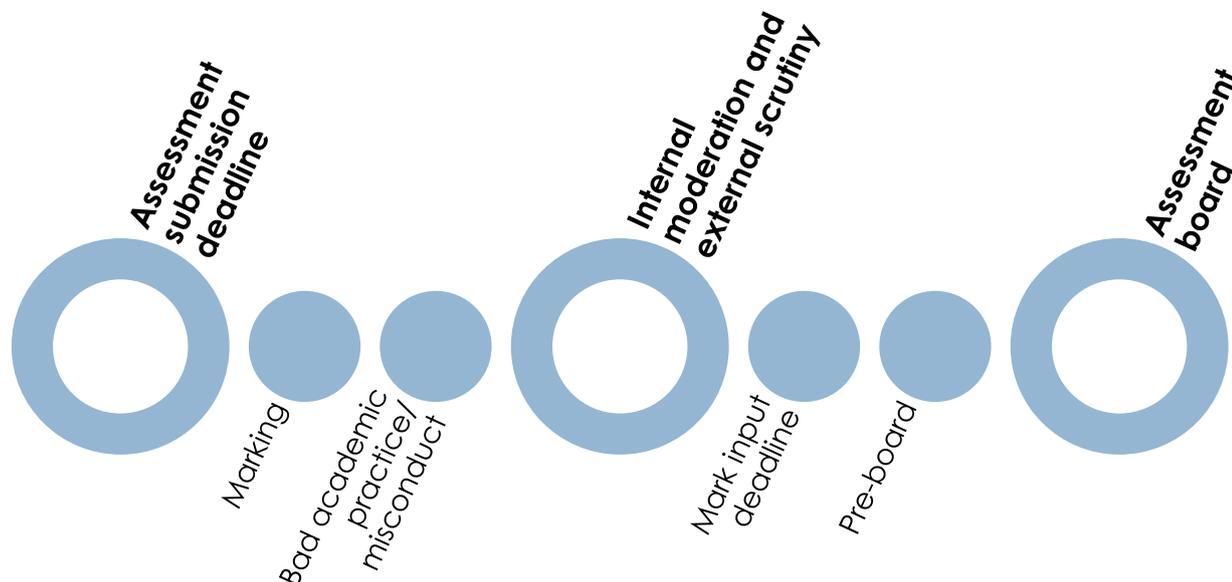
- ✓ Most students have completed the final assessment for the programme – there may be some instances where decisions are still awaited on individual cases eg:
 - Suspected misconduct or bad academic practice
 - Input from an external source such as a placement tutor or external examiner where there is internal disagreement
 - Late submission due to extensions or pending deferral requests
- ✓ Marking, moderation and external scrutiny has taken place in accordance with the university's [assessment and feedback policy](#)
- ✓ A complete and accurate set of results are available by the marks submission deadline, as determined by the faculty office
- ✓ The module mark review (where conducted) can check as many individual component and module-level marks as possible
- ✓ The pre-board can be as efficient as possible in reviewing complete and accurate student profiles
- ✓ Sufficient time for any changes identified at the pre-board can be processed or missing marks found before the main assessment board

Typical assessment board calendar

Standard undergraduate programmes therefore tend to have the main assessment board in June and a reassessment board in September. Postgraduate taught assessment boards are normally held after each semester in March, June, and November. The timing of some boards

may mean most of the business conducted has an interim status, where students are progressing from one semester to the next for example. There is normally a main board which considers most awards ie June for standard undergraduate programmes, and November for postgraduate taught provision. Some subject areas that have non-standard provision may hold boards at different times of the year to suit, such as nursing and midwifery.

Typical assessment process



Who attends assessment boards?

Faculty Academic Committees (FACs) should approve the membership for each assessment board annually and determine that each is properly constituted. The following refers explicitly to assessment boards held in-person mode – please note the [reduced constitution \(and quoracy\) for virtual assessment boards](#).

Constitution

The constitution for in-person assessment boards is as follows:

Role	
Chair	Head of School or Department, or PVC/Dean's nominee
Deputy chair	Associate Dean (Academic) or PVC/Dean's nominee
Programme leader(s)	Programme leader(s)
Subject leader(s)	In faculties where this role exists
External examiner(s)	External examiner(s)
Representatives as nominated by the chair of the board	Programme and module teaching teams
In attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servicing officer/faculty administrative staff • Associate Dean (Academic) or nominee • Representative of the Executive Director of Student and Academic Services

Quoracy

To effect a quorum at in-person assessment boards, the following must be present:

- ✓ Chair or deputy chair
- ✓ Programme leader(s) for the programme(s) under consideration or their nominees
- ✓ Associate Dean (Academic) or their nominee (a senior academic who may have more than one role at the assessment board)
- ✓ Servicing officer
- ✓ Representative of the Executive Director of Student and Academic Services

The following roles reserve the right to attend any assessment board (regardless of whether their nominee or representative is in attendance):

- PVC/Dean
- Associate Dean (Academic)
- The Executive Director of Student and Academic Services

Conflicts of interest

A potential conflict of interest relates to where there is a risk that the official capacity of a member of the assessment board will be unduly influenced by a close connection, loyalty or vested interest in a student under consideration. There is a possibility a member's position may derive personal benefit and/or put into question whether their actions, judgement and/or decision-making in their official capacity can be unbiased.

It is assumed that all board members will execute their duties with the appropriate level of professionalism, integrity and trust expected. Addressing potential conflicts of interest is a precautionary measure to protect employees against criticism or compromise, and where recognised and disclosed, allows appropriate steps to be taken to avoid and manage them.

A connection which could constitute a potential conflict of interest includes (but is not limited to) a close personal or mutually-beneficial relationship such as friendship, family relative or work colleague (particularly hierarchical, where there is a difference in power between the parties, or perceived/actual vulnerability of one of the parties).

If a member of the assessment board is aware of any potential conflict of interest, this must be declared and recorded in the minutes of the meeting and the individual will not take part in any discussion covering the areas or student(s) concerned. At the discretion of the chair, the member concerned may be permitted to remain in attendance for the duration of these discussions and invited to respond to queries of a factual nature relating to them.

Roles and responsibilities of assessment board members

Chair/deputy chair

Working closely with the servicing officer, you will:

- Manage conduct of the board in accordance with the terms of reference
- Ensure members' participation is in line with the constitution
- Ensure protocols and quoracy have been adhered to

Programme leader(s)

Working closely with the servicing officer, you will:

- Co-ordinate assessment including marking, internal moderation, and external scrutiny
- Ensure student's results are available in a complete and accurate form by the agreed deadline
- Present the students' results accurately, ensuring any follow-up actions are clear (see [good practice when ratifying the results](#))
- Provide status updates on any bad academic practice cases/deferral requests
- Present verbal report on behalf of external examiner (if not in attendance at the board)
- Work with the servicing officer on any follow-up actions
- Provide students with guidance and support following results release

External examiner(s)

External examiners are encouraged but not expected to attend assessment boards, they are however required to fully engage in the assessment processes. Their role includes the appropriate sampling of assessments, considering and agreeing internal marking and moderation, and confirming (or otherwise) the marks being awarded to students. It is important to remember that no student decisions can be published until external examiners' confirmation has been received.

Working closely with the programme leader, external examiners will:

- Meet students and discuss their work
- Advise on individual cases where there is internal disagreement (exceptionally)
- Confirm the distribution of marks
- Raise any concerns/issues with the assessment processes/individual student cases
- Provide interim report findings/experience, either verbally at the board (if in attendance), or via email prior to the board

Associate Dean (Academic)

Working closely with the SAAS rep, you will:

- Oversee the board operation and ensure all associated assessment protocols have been adhered to, including marking, internal moderation, and external scrutiny – where this has not yet fully taken place, remind the board that no student decisions may be published until confirmation has been received
- Ensure board protocols and quoracy have been adhered to – proceedings cannot continue until this can be confirmed
- Ensure all regulations (including programme-specific) have been applied consistently and fairly – it is good practice to provide an overview at the board of the programmes under consideration, along with a recap on the academic regulations in place

Servicing officer

Working closely with all members of the board, you will:

- Co-ordinate/undertake the administrative arrangements, from setting the board dates through to minute taking

- Arrange for the appropriate sample of assessments to be sent to external examiners
- Support the provision of complete, accurate, and timely student's results, from pre-board through to release
- Provide updates/background information on individual student cases as necessary
- Keep an accurate record of discussions at the board and actions arising, and complete all related activity post board

Student and Academic Services (SAAS) representative

The SAAS rep's role is crucial to ensure fairness and parity is exercised at the board, so do not be afraid to ask questions! If an individual student case is too complex to resolve at the meeting, ask for the issue to be put on hold – it can be dealt with by chair's action later.

Working closely with the ADA, you will:

- Ensure the board is quorate – proceedings cannot continue until quoracy is confirmed
- Ensure regulations are applied consistently and fairly – seek clarification on any PSRB requirements/programme-specific regulations
- Ensure all associated assessment protocols have been adhered to, including marking, internal moderation, and external scrutiny – where this has not yet fully taken place, remind the board that no student decisions may be published until confirmation has been received
- Annotate the ABRs, noting any amendments/exceptional outcomes, or where they are yet to be approved by the external examiner (see above point)
- Immediately after the board, return the annotated ABRs to the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ), providing a verbal report on proceedings and discussing any concerns

Preparing for an assessment board – hints, tips, and good practice

Do's and don'ts when preparing for an assessment board

- ✓ Ensure external examiners have received timely assessment samples
- ✗ Don't forget to include the SAAS rep in any communications
- ✓ Keep an eye on apologies received and address any impact on quoracy
- ✓ Circulate agendas/previous minutes in advance
- ✗ Do not circulate chair's action log or any other document containing potentially sensitive information – tabled hard copies only
- ✓ Remember to circulate any programme-specific regulations
- ✓ Conduct a final check of the marks, and fairly and consistently review borderline cases
- ✓ Obtain status updates on any APO cases/deferral requests

Documentation checklist for the board

- Hard copy of the chair's action and deferral/interruption log to be tabled for information
- Hard copies of the ABRs – the chair, ADA, SAAS rep, programme leader and servicing officer must all have their own copies – the remaining board members can share
- Reference copy of the full academic regulations, along with any programme-specific regulations (if applicable), and a handful of copies of the academic regulations overview

Conducting an assessment board – hints, tips, and good practice

What to look out for at an assessment board

- The student results are normally ranked by performance, in order of highest to lowest
- The data is colour coded – the more colour, the more issues: focus on these students!
- Alphabetical codes are used to denote the decision for each student – a key is provided
- Look out for...
 - Red blocks, which indicate module failure
 - Greyed-out results are not under consideration
 - Undergraduate: students in the consideration band
 - Postgraduate: dissertation mark (60 credit module) as this determines the highest classification level achievable
 - Exit awards being overlooked, particularly when a student's registration is ending

Ratifying the results – hints, tips, and important considerations

It is important to remember that the formal assessment board is only permitted to ratify the marks as they are presented. The board cannot receive late marks or correct any mark input errors – this should be done at the pre-board stage. Any errors/gaps not picked up beforehand can only be addressed by chair's action taken outside of the board and reported to the next meeting.

Similarly, assessment boards do not have the authority to exercise discretion – any matters of academic judgement must be concluded at the pre-board stage. The only circumstances under which the formal assessment board may exercise discretion is where students are being allowed to progress exceptionally. This scenario is only available for undergraduate programmes, and normally occurs in September. There are set criteria governing the application of this decision – the SAAS rep/ADA can guide on appropriate use at the board.

Here are a few do's and don'ts when ratifying the results:

- It is good practice for the ADA/nominee provide an overview of the programmes under consideration, and a recap on the academic regulations (including programme-specific)
- Report by exception, pausing to clarify borderline cases such as eligibility for the consideration band, and the reason for the outcome eg did not meet the necessary criteria to be uplifted to the higher band and therefore remains on the lower band
- Do not discuss individual students with exceptional circumstances, such as interruption, deferral, or academic offences – these can be noted for the purpose of ratifying the decision, but the details must not be shared with the board
- Provide clear follow-up actions, particularly for resits/deferrals – the more information available for the board, the more useful the communications going out to students will be

Section 2: Virtual assessment boards

Assessment boards should be held as formal face-to-face meetings, whenever it is reasonably and practicably possible. There may be occasions however where this is not possible or effective – in these circumstances, virtual meetings are permitted. Any deviations from the default position of holding in-person meetings must be discussed with and agreed by, the chair, Associate Dean (Academic) and Student and Academic Services representative.

Section 1 of this guide remains relevant and valid irrespective of which mode the board is being held in. However, this section provides additional information relating specifically to virtual assessment boards, and outlines where things may deviate. This includes how to operate online meetings, data protection and information security issues associated with working virtually, and some hints and tips/assistance with virtual meeting technology.

Operational aspects

Virtual assessment boards should be held using MS Teams where possible as this online meeting platform has been assessed and approved in terms of data protection, Internet security and accessibility. Should you wish to use alternative software, please agree this with all participants in advance to ensure similar suitability and compliance checks can be made.

Large virtual meetings with many attendees can make the proceedings difficult to manage and can cause issues with MS Teams. The optimum number of virtual attendees at any one time is 6, with an absolute maximum of 9. The [constitution and quoracy](#) detailed below should assist with keeping attendance to the bare minimum. Attendees may join/leave meetings as appropriate, particularly the role of lead academic. It may also be possible for several representatives from the faculty/programme administration to attend, as is deemed necessary.

Constitution and quoracy

Unlike the in-person assessment board meetings, the virtual mode has a smaller constitution and quoracy. The shortlist of members (below) ensures the board can operate effectively without sacrificing any of the core roles. To effect a quorum, all members of the condensed constitution are required to “attend”, with the exception of external examiners who are required to be involved in the assessment processes but are not expected to join the meeting.

Role	
Chair	Senior academic from the faculty
Lead academic(s)	One representative from each subject/cognate area. For larger boards which cover multiple areas, the academic lead may need to join/depart at the relevant points. Other staff will need to feed in prior to the meeting to ensure that the academic colleague(s) attending the board is/are fully briefed on all programmes being considered.
External examiner(s)	External examiner(s) <i>(not required for quoracy)</i>
Associate Dean (Academic) or their nominee	Nominees are normally Associate Professor (Quality) or Associate Professor (Student Experience) or alternatively, another senior academic
Student and Academic Services rep	

How to run a virtual assessment board

Preparing for a virtual assessment board

The servicing officer should lead on the co-ordination of administrative tasks prior to the virtual assessment board, in the normal way. This includes arrangements for external examiner involvement, as above. An MS Teams meeting invite should be sent to all attendees well in advance of the board date, including the external examiner (by using their email address in the invite recipients' field, as an optional attendee). The MS Teams invite further serves to provide the mechanism by which colleagues will "join" the meeting.

The servicing officer should circulate the agenda, papers, and Assessment Board Reports (ABRs) to all meeting attendees, including external examiners, at least 24 hours prior to the board. As the papers must be treated as highly confidential, please refer to the detailed guidance below on how to do this securely and in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). All board members should review the ABRs in advance of the meeting and make a note of any comments/queries, to facilitate the smooth running of the board.

Conducting a virtual assessment board

To ensure the virtual board runs as efficiently as possible, the chair should confirm the operational aspects and etiquette that are in place, as outlined on the virtual assessment board agenda.

The academic lead should present the results in the normal way, reporting by exception, making clear reference to students by row number, clarifying borderline cases and confirming the reason for certain outcomes (eg consideration band). See [hints, tips and important information when ratifying the results](#). To keep members on track with discussions, servicing officers should use the share screen function in MS Teams to display the relevant paper, scrolling through as the discussion is taking place. If the screen is illegible, then each member should view the papers separately on their own screens. Where board members are reviewing their own results (ie the share screen option is not workable), it is particularly important to ensure the ratification process is clear and proceeding at a manageable speed for all.

It is vital to get the SAAS rep's agreement on decisions being made, particularly where cases are exceptional or complex. The chair should ensure the meeting is going at a pace that allows sufficient time for questions to be raised, and both the servicing officer and SAAS rep to take any necessary notes.

Following up after the virtual assessment board

If there are any amendments made to the ABRs following the board, the updated version must be recirculated, again using the appropriate mechanisms to keep the data secure. Chair's actions carried out after the board should be managed as per normal processes.

Confidentiality and data security issues with virtual assessment boards

Prior to the virtual assessment board

All assessment board papers should be stored within your agreed document share location, such as a shared network drive, SharePoint site or MS OneDrive user area. When sharing the files (with assessment board members for example), ensure that all recipients can access the content, without jeopardising data security. It is acceptable to email documents as attachments to internal members of the assessment board, although extra care and attention must be paid as this method opposes the highest risk of a GDPR breach. External recipients (such as external examiners, collaborative partner staff etc) must receive their papers via

Zend, using the appropriate pass code security features. Do not upload or share papers via SharePoint, OneDrive or MS Teams as these cloud-based solutions are not secure.

Any document containing personal or sensitive information (such as the ABRs, deferral/interruption logs etc) must be individually password protected to ensure they are securely encrypted, regardless of the sharing mechanism used. The password must be provided under separate cover to the documents themselves and preferably via an alternative method eg MS Teams or within the meeting invite. Check the Data Security @DMU microsite for detailed information and resources: <https://www.dmu.ac.uk/datasecurity>.

At the virtual assessment board

For assessment board meetings to remain confidential, all participants should (where possible) attend from a location that ensures the screen is not visible to anyone else and where discussions cannot be overheard. During the meeting, it is also essential not to create any "record" of the proceedings, except the normal minute taking. As such, the recording function and chats features built into MS Teams should not be used (servicing officer to disable these as default, where possible). Similarly, please do not deposit any documents within the file area of MS Teams, or use the chat function to discuss individual students/cases.

After the virtual assessment board

Immediately after the board, the SAAS rep should upload the ABRs onto the SharePoint site (link provided separately), with any amendments/queries clearly annotated. Once the business of the board has been finalised, members must delete all papers and associated emails, including from temporary/download areas.

Rules, tips, and etiquette for virtual meetings

Prior to the virtual assessment board

To help keep virtual meetings productive, professional, and accessible, please follow these general principles when getting set up:

- **Optimum conditions** – try and find a quiet, well-lit space where you won't be disturbed by others, and keep background noise to a minimum (see also [confidentiality/data protection](#))
- **Be aware of your surroundings** – make sure your background is professional and work appropriate (this can be blurred if necessary)
- **Minimise distractions** – mute your computer and phone alerts for texts, emails and other notices that might go off during the meeting (closing unnecessary programs also help speed up your device)
- **Check your technology is working** – test your equipment and connection speed, and familiarise yourself with the software (see also [troubleshooting/assistance with virtual meeting technology](#))
- **Dress appropriately** – virtual meetings work best with the cameras on, so be mindful of this – smart casual works best
- **Be ready to join the meeting on time** – the host should be online 10 minutes before the meeting starts
- **Meeting hosts** – if you are hosting the meeting (ie setting it up etc which will most likely be the servicing officer), disable the recording function and chat feature to ensure confidentiality

At the virtual assessment board

At the start of each board, the chair should confirm the operational aspects and etiquette that are in place, as follows:

1. **Feature usage** – remind attendees that the built-in recording function and chats features should not be used to ensure discussions are held confidentially and not stored anywhere
2. **Cameras on** – seeing other meeting participants not only helps engagement levels, but also assists with meeting accessibility needs
3. **Mute your microphone** when you're not talking – this helps minimise interference and background noise – but remember to switch it back on when you wish to contribute
4. **Speaking up** – be mindful when others are speaking and try not to interrupt someone mid-sentence – it's good to introduce yourself before contributing and speak clearly and slowly
5. **Be seated and stay present** – try not to get distracted or engage in anything else (including eating!) – handwrite notes instead of typing, where possible

Troubleshooting/assistance with virtual meeting technology

Poor image/audio quality during a virtual meeting is largely due to Internet connectivity issues. Below are a few quick hints and tips to assist if you experience problems. The MS Teams help and learning webpage is also a useful resource: <https://support.office.com/en-sg/teams>.

1. A hard-wired Internet connection is best, alternatively, position yourself as close to the wireless router as possible, particularly where there are many users within the same space
2. Muting microphones when not speaking will help reduce interference, as will minimising background noise
3. Using a headset/headphones with microphone produces better quality audio input compared to inbuilt options, and remember to speak clearly and slowly
4. Switching cameras off places less demand on the system – you should also close all unnecessary programs that are running in the background
5. Minimising meeting attendance to 6 members will also help