

Section 42 Protocol for School Assessment Board analysis

42.1 Protocol for identifying and reviewing anomalous performance in modules

42.1.1 As a matter of course, a School Assessment Board (SAB) should consider:

- a) The overall performance of all students on a particular module compared with:
 - Related modules on the programme – is this an outlier module?
 - The same module in previous years, if it was delivered then – has something unexpected happened this year?
- b) The overall performance of all students in each assessment component compared with other assessment components in that module – did students find one component easier or more difficult than others?
- c) The overall performance of all students in particular assessment types (such as an examination, a group presentation) across all modules – did students find some types of assessment easier or more difficult than others?
- d) The overall performance of students on modules in a particular year of their studies compared with other years – is there an identifiable progression in the mark distribution?
- e) If there are any modules with an abnormal (such as a high number of firsts or fails) or bimodal distribution of marks, this may indicate that there is a difference in performance of identifiable subsets of students on a module or in particular assessments compared with the whole cohort – might there be an unconscious bias towards or away from particular students? This would require more detailed analysis after the SAB.

42.1.2 The minutes of the School Assessment Board should note any anomalous performance and, where possible, the reason identified for it and note where marks were not agreed. They should also note any action to be taken.

This may include a module/assessment change proposed to the Programme Amendment Scrutiny Panel to take effect from the start of the next academic year; it may also include recommendations for action on the current cohort of students.

42.1.3 In practice, each year there may be an 'outlier module', and it is likely that some students will perform differently on different types of assessment and on different components. The decisions for the School Assessment Board are whether the anomalous performance is exceptional and/or whether it is appropriate for a proposed solution to be provided internally or if it requires further independent analysis.

42.1.4 Clearly, such detailed analysis cannot take place 'live' at a School Assessment Board meeting; programme teams would be expected to undertake this work both before and after the meeting, as an integral part of the usual annual and other forms of review.

42.2 Principles

The proposed principles for an independent review are set out below:

- 42.2.1 Anomalous performance is – deliberately – not defined.
- 42.2.2 If there is a **significant** issue, the School Assessment Board may recommend to the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee that an independent review takes place. It may also recommend a timescale for completion of the review. The Academic Registrar or Head of Registry must be informed as soon as possible; either will be able to advise on possible courses of action.
- 42.2.3 The Quality and Standards Committee or University Assessment Board may also instigate a review, or place actions on a School Assessment Board, following an overall review of School Assessment Board data.
- 42.2.4 The School Assessment Board decides whether or not to approve the marks in question (although it should seek Registry advice before so doing). If the marks for one or more modules are not approved, then it will necessarily impact on student progression or award.
- 42.2.5 The scope of the review is defined (for example, specific modules, all or particular subsets of students). A review is expected to address the reasons for anomalous performance and not the marks themselves.
- 42.2.6 External examiners are informed if an independent review instigated by the Quality and Standards Committee or University Assessment Board will take place.
 - If the review has been instigated by the School Assessment Board itself, then the external examiners will necessarily be part of that decision.
 - If a review is being conducted by the School Assessment Board itself, external examiners – as members of the School Assessment Board – will necessarily be involved in the review itself.
- 42.2.7 The Independent Review Panel comprises:
 - a) A Head/Dean of School or their designate from another School.
 - b) A senior academic, not associated with the provision, from another Higher Education institution.
 - This excludes: current and former external examiners; those involved in the approval or monitoring of the programme; current and former students; potential employers. Where appropriate, a professional body representative may also be included on the panel.
 - c) Administrative support provided by Registry.
- 42.2.8 The Independent Review Panel may request any material it wishes and may meet particular groups of people. This may include senior staff in the School, teaching staff, students, employers.
- 42.2.9 After the review, the Independent Review Panel produces a draft report, including possible actions for consideration; the point in the assessment process at which the anomaly was identified (before or after the marks have been agreed) will influence what actions may be required.
 - a) Any actions need to be fair and equitable not just for those affected but for all other students.
 - b) Any action should not give those affected by the anomaly an unfair advantage.
 - c) Any action taken should be within the Terms of Reference of the appropriate body; clear delegation is given to the Chair to act if required.
 - d) An action is included that recommends what communications are required with students.
- 42.2.10 The report is processed as follows:
 - a) The draft report is sent to the School for a factual accuracy check.
 - b) The updated report is sent to the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee, to the Chair of the University Assessment Board, to the Head/Dean of School, the Academic Registrar and to any appropriate members of the School Senior Leadership team.
 - c) The recipients produce a consolidated action plan in response to the report and specifically to any recommendations that it includes. Any actions that have already been put into place should be included.
 - d) The report and the action plan are presented to the Quality and Standards Committee.