

The future of exam boards

Exam board roles

This fact sheet shares key insights about the roles supporting exam boards, as described in the survey responses from 67 higher education institutions, at the end of the 2023/24 academic year.

Exam Board Membership

Institutions were asked to provide details from their regulations about the membership of their exam boards. These are difficult to draw conclusion from, given the varied exam board structures, organisational structures and terminology for operations and roles. However, the following broad observations were made:

Academic membership: Varies by type of exam board and exam board structure [*see the Fact Sheet: Exam Board Structures for more details on structures*].

- Module/Subject Boards: typically module leaders, tutors, and subject leads;
- Programme/Award Boards: programme leaders/directors and heads of department/school;
- Faculty/University Boards: deans, heads of school, assessment leads.

Senior academic leadership: Senior academic leadership roles – such as Heads, Deans, Associate Deans, PVCs—are widely present as Chairs of exam boards, and slightly more prevalent in exam boards structured for function or oversight.

Academic leadership: Programme and Module Leaders appear but variably, because their inclusion depends on the nature and level of each board.

External examiners: Feature almost universally and consistently across all board types. The role of the Chief External Examiner occurs more in functional and oversight structures. [*see the Fact Sheet: External Examiner Role for more details*].

Independence and governance controls: Approaches are not universal. Independent chairs are explicitly mentioned in six institutions, in functional and oversight structures. Only 3 institutions stated quoracy in the regulation text on membership provided in the survey.

Professional services: Representation from Quality teams, Registry, Academic Services and similar professional support units varies. Registry/Registrar/Secretary presence is one of the clearest differences between exam board structures, with their membership most explicit in exam boards structured for function.

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) and Partners: Some institutions, across all exam board structures, include PSRB representatives, industry externals, partner institution representatives (co-opted or in attendance).

Students: One institution states explicitly that students must not attend exam boards.

Internal independent roles

Institutions were asked if anyone internal to the institution attends the board as an independent advisor on the application of the regulations and/or function of the board. There were some discrepancies in the data which indicate this question was open to interpretation.

37 institutions had independent roles at boards

- Indicated they had independent advisers, although they were not required at every exam board

An independent regulatory expert

- Typically carried out by professional services, drawing on Registrars, Deputy Registrars, Academic Quality, Assessment Teams, School Administrators.
- In a small number of institutions this role is carried out by an academic.

Independent advisers were part of risk management

- One institution described their risk-based approach, carrying out random sampling observations, and identifying specific exam boards based on risk factors such as known complex cases, new Chairs, and new regulations.

Alternatives to independent advisers

- Institutions without independent advisers ensured regulations were applied correctly and consistently through training, exam board Chairs, external examiners, registry and professional services roles at boards, centralised operation of exam boards and oversight by a quality and standards committee.

Ensuring regulations are applied correctly and consistently

For institutions who did not have an internal independent adviser role at exam boards, we asked how they ensured regulations were applied correctly and consistently.



Training & Guidance

We asked all institutions what training was delivered, who delivered it, and the format or training and guidance. These were free-form questions which meant that the data had to be interpreted and coded.

Support is predominantly delivered through written guidance (which may be communications about core processes or dedicated manuals), dedicated briefing sessions, ad-hoc meetings as required, and drop-ins sessions.

Specific training is delivered to key roles, typically Chairs of Exam Boards (in 44 institutions) and Professional services staff (in 22 institutions).

Practice is mixed on whether Chairs training is mandatory, optional, or targeted at new members.

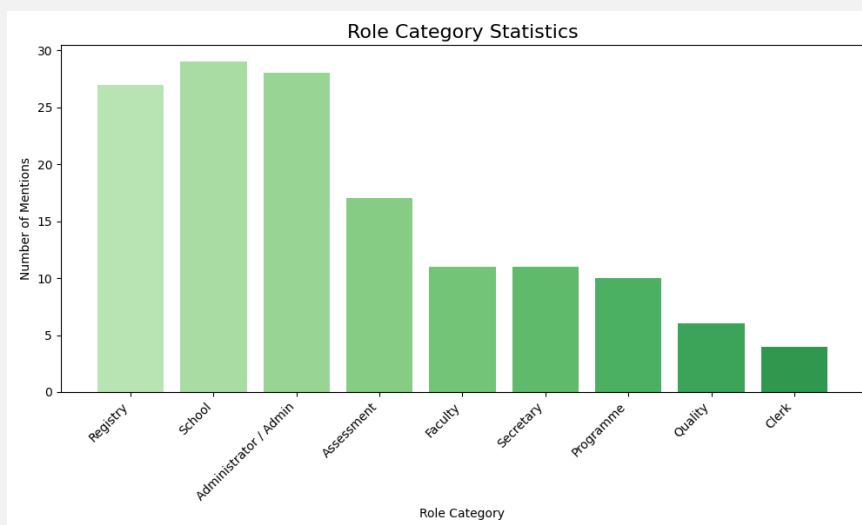
General exam board training is offered to a wider group of academic staff (in 10 institutions), and to external examiners (in 4 institutions).

Training is typically delivered by **Registry teams** – that might include academic quality teams or assessment teams, and delivered on an **annual basis** in the lead up to exam boards.

Record keeping roles

Record keeping is an essential part of the process. The majority of institutions retain a written record of decisions in a standalone document - either Microsoft Word or annotated versions of the student profiles reviewed by the exam board. A small number of institutions (14) hold an electronic minute in the student record system – 7 of these using the electronic minute as the sole record of the decision.

Minute-taking is carried out by professional services staff. There is wide variation in roles, based on institutional terminology.



The following observations were made about the administrative roles:

- **Registry / Academic Registry teams** – often serve as Board Secretaries or Assessment Officers and maintain formal records.
- **School or Department Administrators** – frequently minute module, programme, or school-level boards.
- **Assessment Teams / Assessment Officers** – document decisions and update systems (e.g., student records).
- **Faculty Professional Services** – support faculty-level boards.
- **Quality Assurance teams** – in some institutions produce minutes or maintain formal annotated records.
- **Clerks / Secretaries** – named meeting secretaries from central or school-based services.

Key takeaways

1. Exam board membership is predominantly academic staff, and composition varies by institution and by exam board structure.
2. More than half of the survey respondents have independent internal roles that attend exam boards to provide regulatory advice.
3. Training & guidance is often targeted at Chairs of Exam Boards and professional services staff, and delivered by professional service teams.
4. Formal record keeping is carried out by administrative roles, and traditional minutes still feature heavily, although some institutions have moved to electronic minutes in the student record system.



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