

The future of exam boards – sharing practice about sector challenges, changes and innovation

16 October 2025

London School of Economics

Project Team

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QAA Project overview

Funded QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project (March 24 – Dec 25)

University of Bristol, Kingston University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of Leeds, University of Sunderland, London School of Economics, University of Bedfordshire

Goals

- Develop evidence base around exam board practice in the UK
- Create spaces for practice and knowledge-sharing
- Showcase innovative approaches to exam boards
- Collaboratively problem-solve – what is stopping us improving this space? How can we collectively work towards something 'better'?

Elements

Three core elements:

1. surveying practice (survey with responses from 67 institutions);
2. case summaries (aiming for 10 to be published)
3. workshops (to generate insights, share practice and create discussions)

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Schedule

- **10.30-11.00 Introductions and insights from the project to date**
Charlotte Verney & Michaela Pittom
- **11.00-13.00 Examples of innovation and change in the sector**
 - Range of speakers
 - Panel Q&A
- **13.00-14.00 Lunch in the LSE Staff Dining Room**
- **14:00-15:30 Practice-sharing workshop**
Everyone
- **15:30-16:00 Reflections, next steps, close**
Charlotte Verney & Michaela Pittom

Contributing data to the project – your participation today

Participation Information Sheet - please read it – it has been approved through the University of Bristol Ethics procedure

Data captured today through:

- Padlet questions
- Workshop group notes (photographed)
- Feedback survey

It does NOT include any individual notes you make on your workshop activity sheet

Consent

By taking part in the workshop, you give consent for the data you have provided to be used as part of the project. You may request for specific comments or notes to be excluded from the data immediately after the workshop.

Goals today

- Share key insights from the project to date
- Share examples of change and innovation in the management of exam boards
- Provide a space to apply sector experiences to your own context

We hope that you will leave here with...

IDEAS

REASSURANCE

CONFIDENCE

CONTACTS

ACTIONS

PROJECT INSIGHTS

- Survey with 67 institutions responding
- ARC Annual Conference 2024
- SROC 2025
- ARC Assessment Practitioner's Group – regular updates

Early thinking on exam board structures

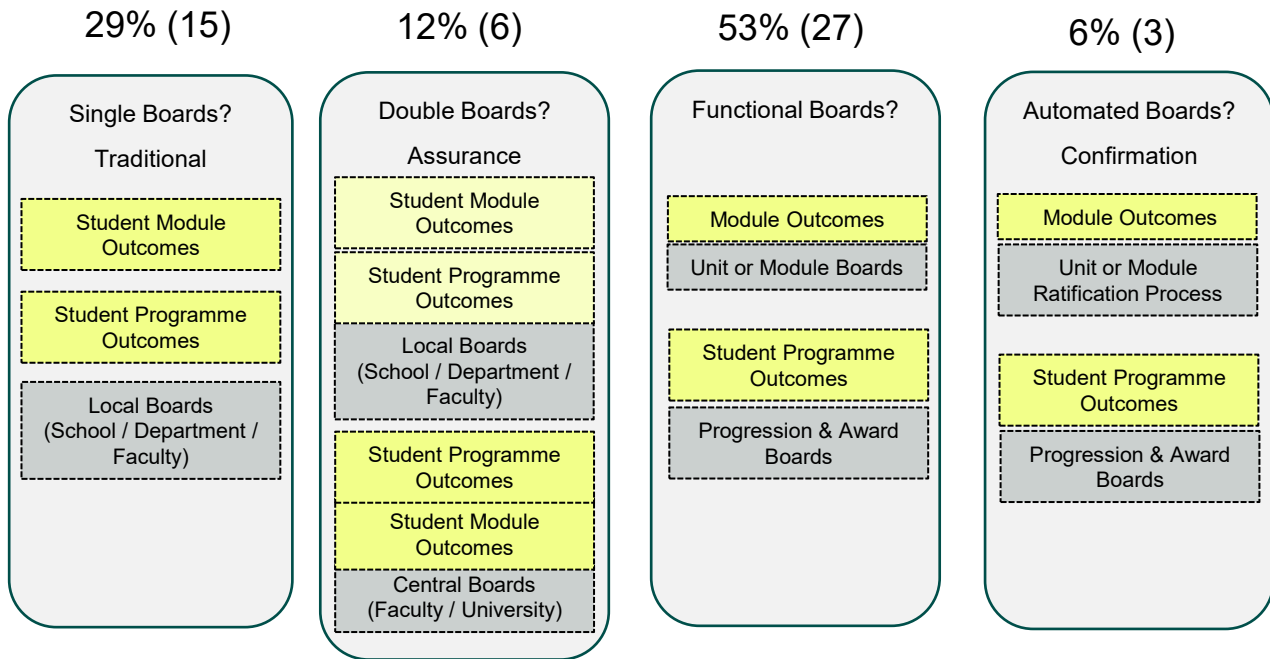
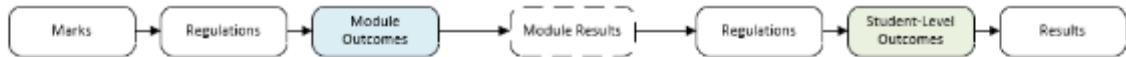


Figure: Potential Exam Board Models in the UK, created by Charlotte Verney (2024)

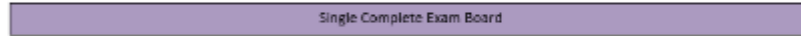
Revised thinking on exam board structures



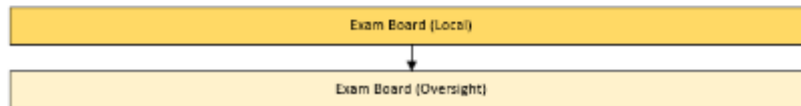
Structured for Function



Structured for Single Delegated Authority



Structured for Oversight



Survey Insights: How is the sector structuring its exam boards?

Structure for Function

Defining Feature:

Separates out the functions of ratifying module level outcomes and student level outcomes.

- 32 institutions

“Module Boards”
“Progression & Award Boards”

Structured for a Single Delegated Authority

Defining Feature:

Ratifying module level outcomes and student level outcomes takes place together, once.

- 24 institutions

“Exam Boards”

Structured for Oversight

Defining Feature:

Ratifying module level outcomes and student level outcomes takes place together, where some outcomes are considered more than once.

- 11 institutions

“School / Subject Boards”
“Faculty Exam Boards”

Using systems to enhance the process within each structure

Survey Insights: What discussions and decisions are exam boards making?

Decision	Active discussion	Formal ratification	For information	Other (C/E response)
Reassessment opportunities	52.5%	37.8%	4.9%	4.9%
Student progression	42.6%	44.3%	8.2%	4.9%
Student award classification	41.0%	47.5%	8.2%	3.2%
Compensation or condonement	41.0%	44.3%	1.6%	13.1%
The award of credit	39.3%	44.3%	11.5%	4.9%
Final marks for modules	37.8%	41.0%	16.4%	4.9%
Student award title (exit award)	36.15%	42.6%	13.1%	8.2%
Final marks for individual assessments	29.5%	45.9%	18.0%	6.5%

How is the sector using its systems?

Insights from SROC 2025

Before exam boards

What institutions do well

- Calculating overall marks and outcomes
- Automated capping
- Single system
- Online exceptional circumstances
- Generating exam board paperwork
- Error reports to flag gaps in data
- Data entry
- Integration with the VLE

What could be improved?

- All of the good things!
- Penalties
- Reassessment

During exam boards

What institutions do well

- Presentation of data
- Predicted outcomes
- Data sorted by predicted outcomes
- System has replaced exam board meetings

What could be improved?

- Manual recording / annotation of reports
- More links to related activities (EC / AC / Appeals)
- Single process
- Update system during the board

After exam boards

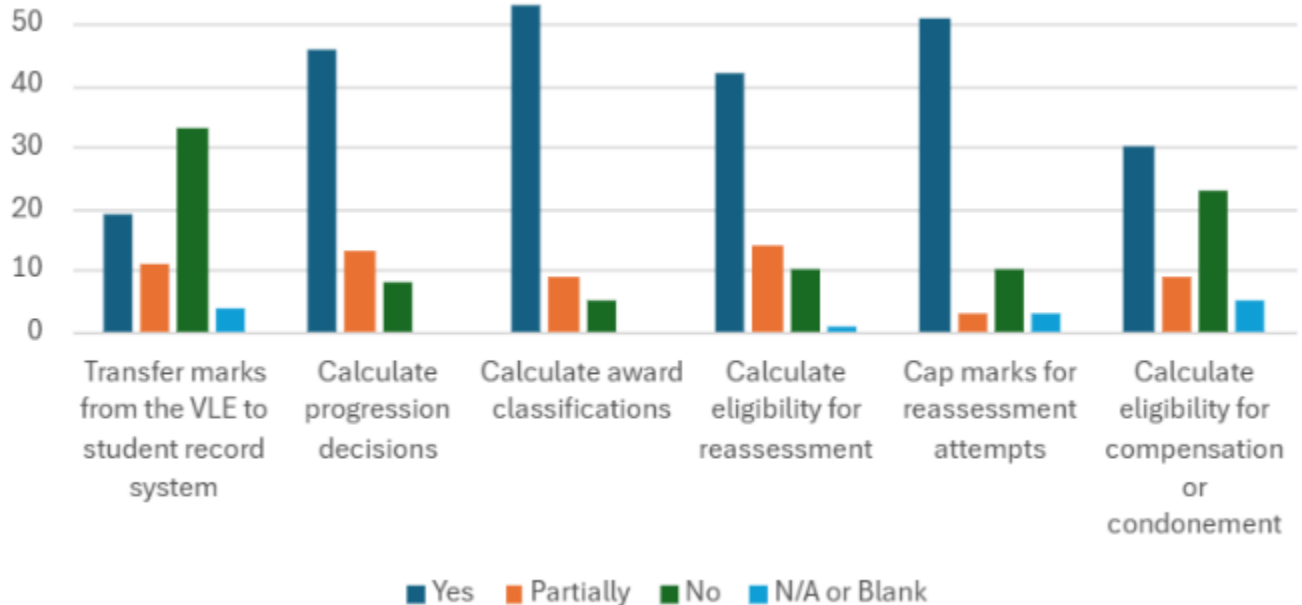
What institutions do well

- Results publication process
- Results releasing in one system
- Automated outcomes letters
- Grade change audit
- Error reporting

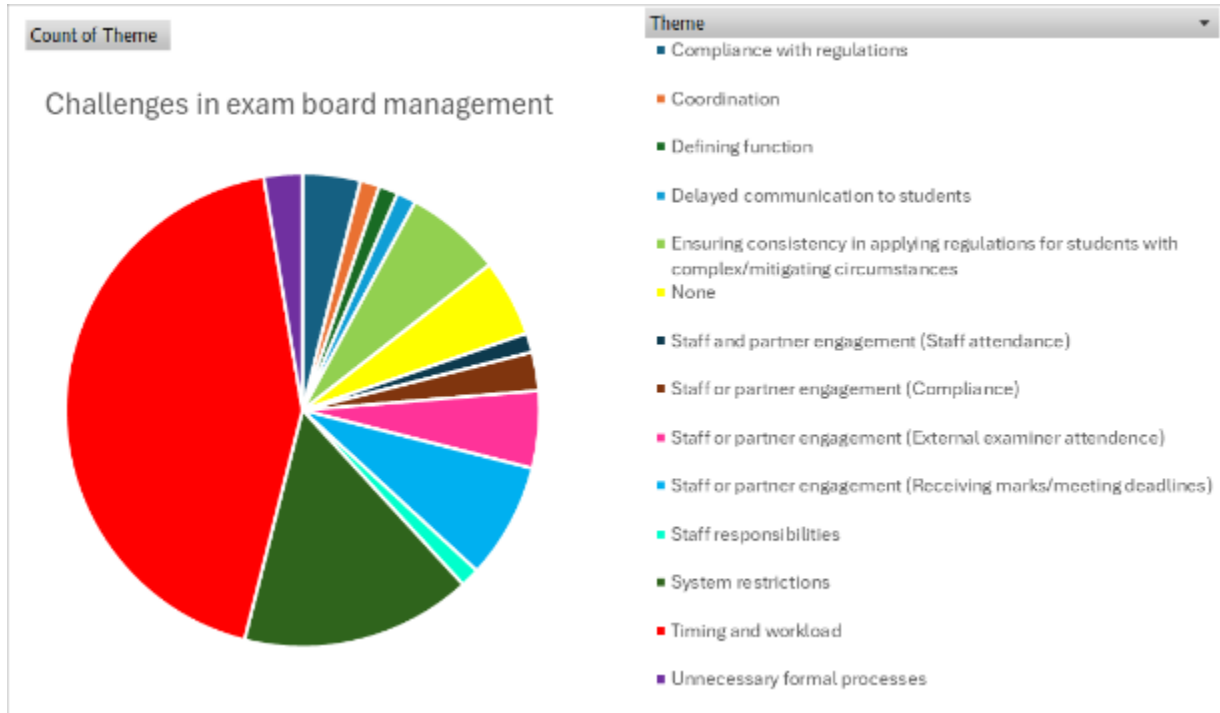
What could be improved?

- Changes to decisions
- Automated communications
- Non-happy student pathway

Survey Insights: How is the sector automating its regulations?



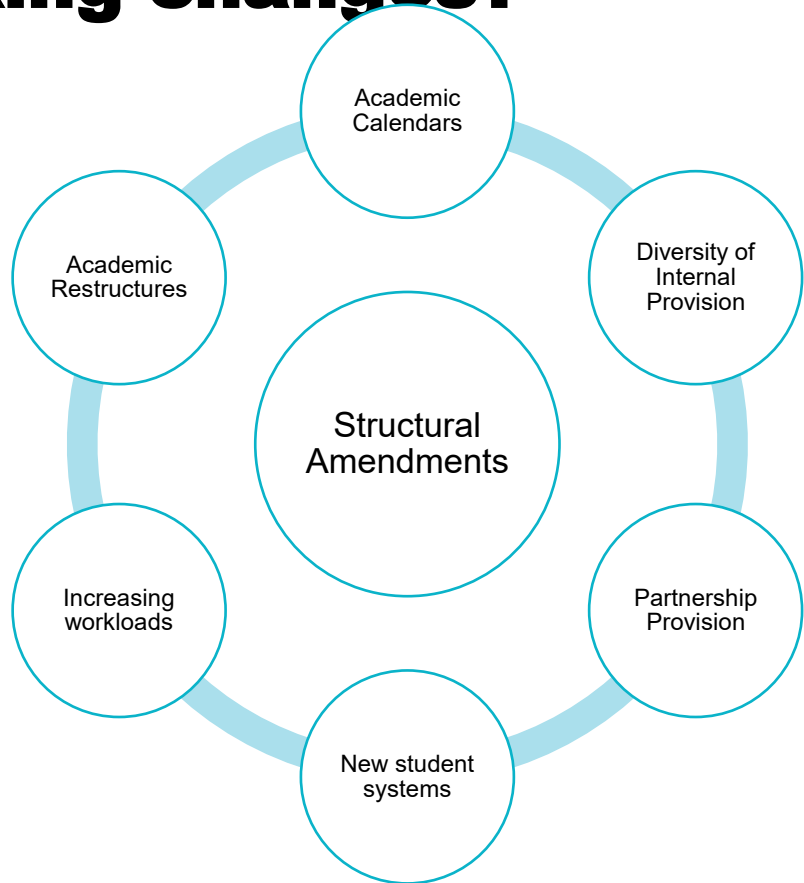
Survey Insights: What is the sector finding challenging?



Survey Insights: Why is the sector making changes?

Reactive change

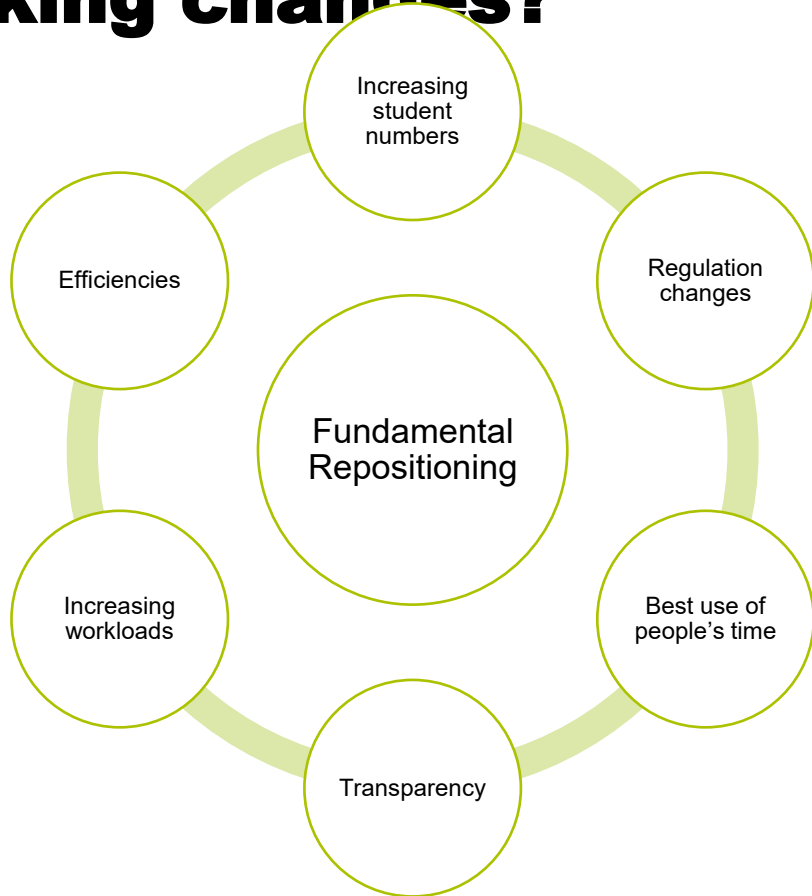
- Timing
- Frequency
- Membership
- Structure



Survey Insights: Why is the sector making changes?

Proactive change

- Purpose
- Regulation simplification
- Regulation Automation
- Process Efficiency
- Membership
- Student experience



Survey Insights: What are institutions changing?

Timing of boards

- Timeliness of boards – not necessarily about having fewer boards**

Internal membership

- Smaller, including QA roles, reflecting new academic leadership roles

External involvement

- Increasing engagement, changing focus, reducing engagement
- Holistic rethink, reducing engagement in time-bound processes**

Regulation simplification

- Desire to standardise, simplify and make clearer to students
- In some places adding more rules (and complexity)

System automation

- Overwhelming *desire* to use systems better
- Different starting points, institutional factors, drivers

Structure of exam boards

- Replacing module boards with clear processes
- Increasing consistency, especially with partners**

Purpose

- Holistic review – do we need them? And if so, what for? **

Survey Insights: What are institutions learning from delivering change to exam boards?

Planning

- extensive, early, clear timescales

Design:

- consistency, definitions, impact analysis

Delivery:

- high-workload, test end-to-end, communicate clearly, extensive training, IT support, log issues & loopholes

Culture

- Large-scale complex, academic buy-in, institutional resistance to change

Impact

- Online boards positive, removing bureaucracy does not necessarily change the outcome, keep reviewing practice

What do we want the future to look like? According to Academic Registrars

Utopia 1

- One set of regulations and one record system
- Automate almost entirely.
- Only professional service staff involved.
- Academic focus is on marks and accuracy.
- Can meet to discuss enhancements/ data/ EE feedback.
- University level boards to discuss 'exceptional' cases and for consistency across uni.
- Do we need boards at all?

Utopia 2

- Do we even need them (boards)?
- Academic judgement comes way before a board, locking records as soon as confirmed, someone responsible for confirming it is all done and correct, forcing a deadline on marking/ ratification.
- Not the process of getting the marks signed off but the overarching conversations.
- Strategic use of 'EE's' critical friend. Focus on the 'proper' conversations- academic standards.

Utopia 3

- Before- marks in, processed, verified... board ready. Good, fit for purpose, well understood regs. Training- clear roles and responsibilities. ECs dealt with and applied. One (underlined multiple times) board per 'unit' (school, dept, faculty?) EE engagement.
- During- review progression, judgements- where discretion allows (might be no discretion). Online. EE as independent authority, oversight, academic external assurance, critical friend (might not all be in the meeting).
- After- EE engagement (reports). Little/ no 'chairs action'/ retrospective decisions.

Utopia 4

- Purpose- Bring together academic community. QA&E data- trends. Attainment review. Case study analysis. Assessment strat overview. Regs review. Defining the academic responsibility (underlined)- leadership, professional services organisation to facilitate new model, relationship to existing gov. structures. The bigger questions not operational (underlined multiple times).
- Timing- Continuous management of student profile, academic meetings at relevant points in time to effect change.
- Outside? Individual student results and award- designed data system dashboard learner analytics, student engagement/ attendance/ profile- with the right services.
Spotting things that aren't right? Mitigating circs needs defining to happen outside.

What do we want the future to look like? According to Academic Registrars

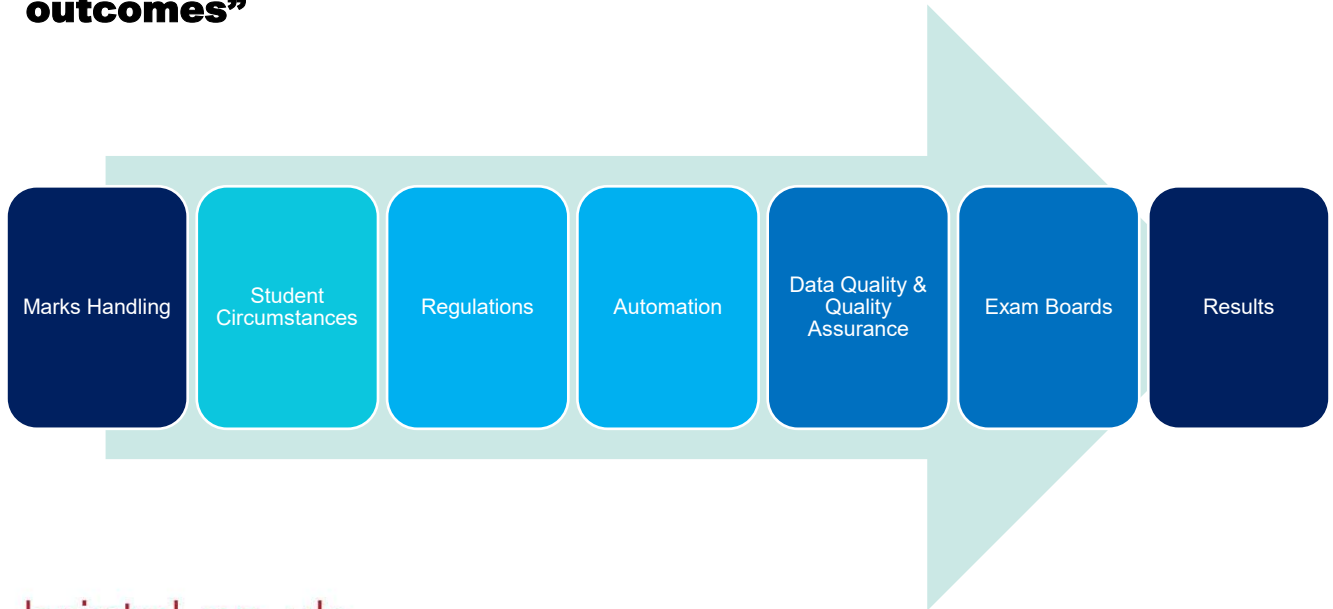
Utopia 5

- Rules based simple regs
- Robust systems
- Deadlines
- VLE and SRS auto migrate
- No Boards! Automated decisions

How do we move towards the future?

Reframe the conversation

From “exam boards” to “a process for confirming student outcomes”



Examples of innovation

Online module ratification and institutional external examiners – Kingston University, Michaela Pittom

University progression & award boards, external quality advisers and module exam boards
University of Chester, Steve Nelson

Professional services progression & award panels – University of Gloucester, Daniel Ramsay

Contexts of change – how are we innovating in different contexts?

Taking stock after the pandemic – an assessment board review
University of Leeds, Rachel Morritt

Streamlining the approach to confirming student outcomes & responding to academic structural changes

University of Bristol, Charlotte Verney

Redesigning exam board processes as part of a system implementation Arden University,
Rosella Brennan

Regulation automation to enable university-level boards
Sunderland University, Joanne Wake

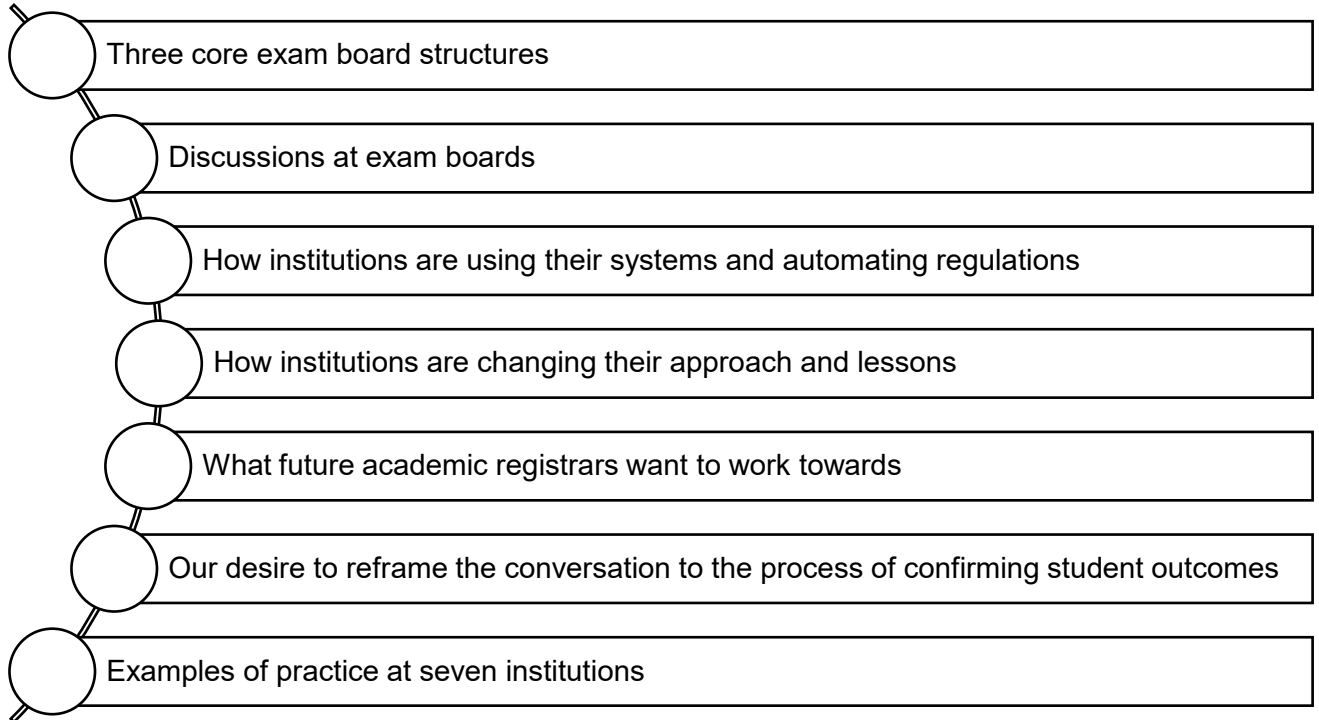
Removing progression boards
Northumbria University, Muriel Campion

Question themes from the room & padlet

- Timing of exam boards during a student's academic year
- Formal records of decisions from boards and ratification steps
- External examiner engagement in marking samples and timing of this
- Deadlines and escalation steps
- System-specific questions, especially around module ratification and chairs action portal
- Exam board reports
- Discretion within academic regulations
- Does automation change the character of exam boards?
- Reassessment complexities – systems, moderation, timing of reassessment attempt and impact on exam boards
- Staffing resources to deliver changes in system automation
- Communicating and supporting students with results
- Appealing decisions from exam boards
- Using AI in marking and the impact on exam board processes

LUNCH BREAK

Recap on the morning



Workshop: exam board change in your own context (1 hour)

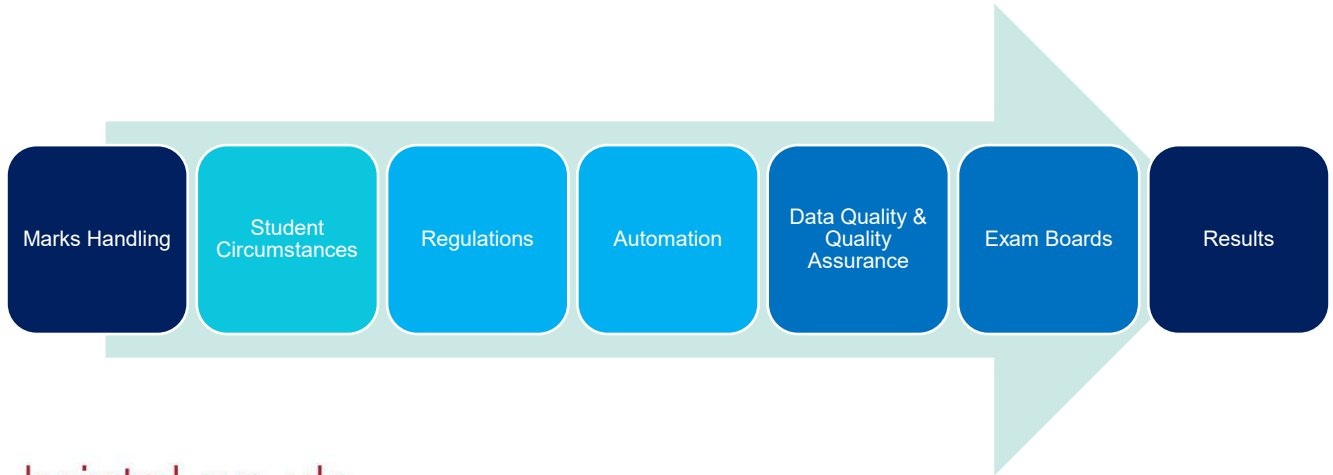
- Structured conversation in small groups
- Collective insights, share knowledge, find solutions

Three rounds, each round (10-15 mins)

- We have posed 2-3 questions for you to consider and discuss
- You each have an activity sheet to write your personal reflections and notes on
- Each table has a 'host' who will capture some key points from discussion and summarise to the next group

How do we move towards the future in our own context?

- Round 1: Reflect
- Round 2: Apply
- Round 3: Action



Workshop – Feedback from Groups

- Academic culture differences between institutions; is there a need for buy-in or is there an open door to be pushed?
- We can be more radical than first thought
- The role of externals
- Endless opportunities, but lots of interdependencies, and how do we get prioritized?
- Marks transfer to VLE – how did people achieve this as some finding it very hard?
- How do we have data assurance without formal boards?
- How do we get accurate and timely marks?
- Reassurance that there is diversity, and no single solution
- Exceptional circumstances discussed at a board or not?
- Have we got the right systems to deliver automation?
- How can we make the case for change? Can we quantify what work goes on?
- “By exception” - are all the exceptions really exceptions?
- Which tasks need completing, and who is best place to do them?
- Strong and well-trained chair
- How do we remove discretion?

WRAP UP

- Project next steps
- Final questions & reflections
- Feedback on today

Next steps for the project

Workshop Outputs

- Presentations and workshop outputs will be shared on the project website

Information Sheets

- A series of information sheets will be published on the website

Further Workshops

- ARC Annual Conference – what next for the sector?
- SROC 2026 (TBC)

Self-Assessment Tool

- Develop version 2.0 of the tool
- Develop more detailed guidance for each element

Self-assessment tool v.1.0

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Exam Boards					
Regulation					
Automation					
Quality Assurance					
Student Circumstances					
Marks Handling					

Feedback on today

This is part of our evaluation for the project, so please do take 5 minutes to let us know your thoughts!

Follow the project

Keep an eye on the QAA project webpage: [The future of exam boards \(qaa.ac.uk\)](http://qaa.ac.uk)

Follow Charlotte & Michaela on LinkedIn for updates

Get in touch with Charlotte or Michaela if there are areas of exam board practice that you want insight to from our data more urgently:

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