

THE FUTURE OF EXAM BOARDS

Update for ARC Assessment Practitioners Group
May 2025

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'?

Phases

Three phases: surveying practice (survey with over 60 HEIs responding), case summaries (aiming for 10 to be published), workshops (to generate insights, share practice and create discussions)

Goals today

Previously shared with ARC APG

- November 2023 initial workshop which kick-started the project
- February 2024 practice-sharing – agendas and minutes
- November 2024 initial survey insights

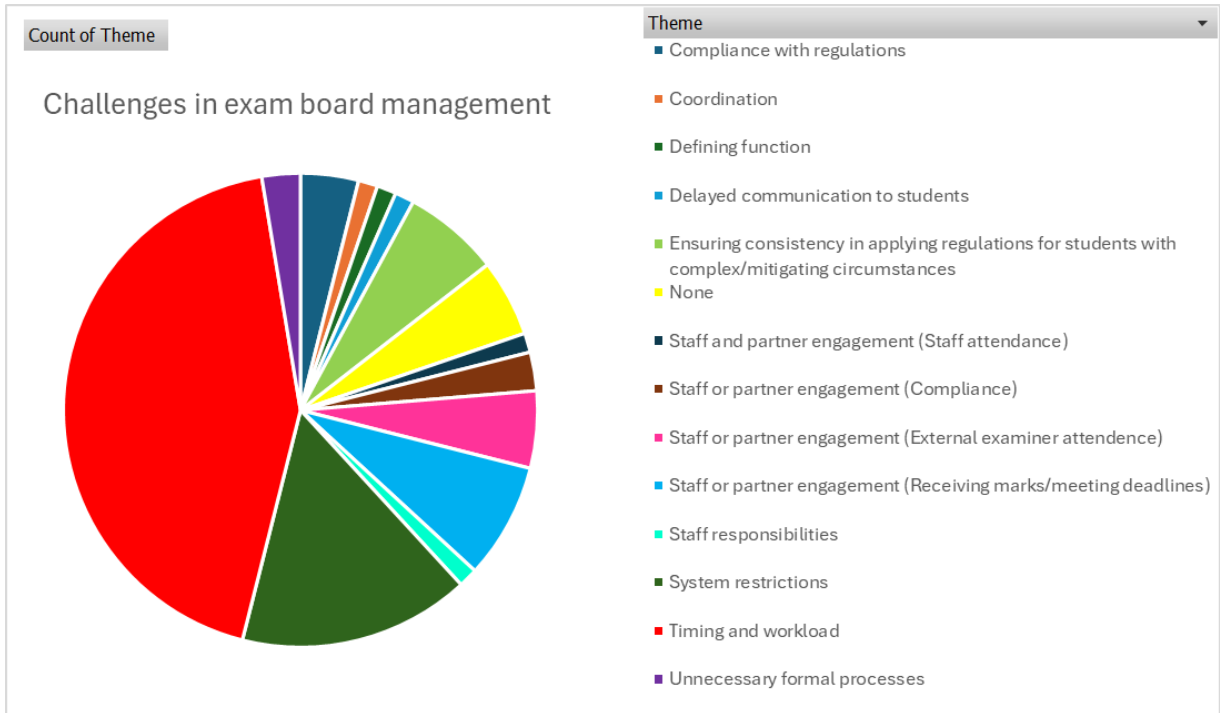
Today

- Insights into system use
- Insights into ARC Utopia
- Update on next steps & resources
- Q&A

USE OF SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT EXAM BOARDS

- Initial survey insights
- SROC workshop insights

Survey Insights: timing, workload and systems are biggest challenges



Survey Insights: institutional changes to exam boards

Change delivered 2020-2024

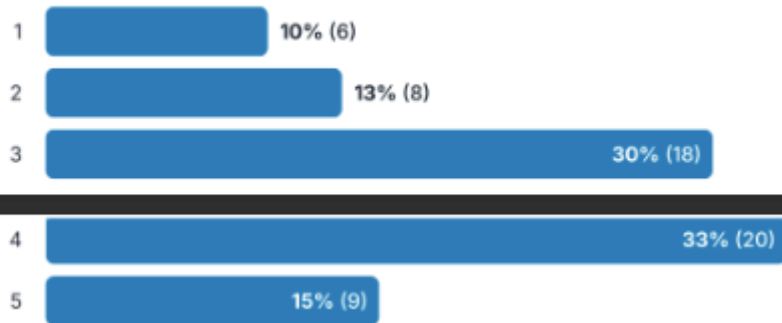
- Exc. Circs. – 37%
- Regulations – 31%
- Timing – 25%
- Systems – 19%
- Reassessment – 16%
- Model – 10%
- Externals – 8%
- Partner boards – 2%

Change actively being considered or delivered 2024/25

- Model – 31%
- Systems – 29%
- Timing – 23%
- Regulations – 21%
- Reassessment – 20%
- Externals – 18%
- Partner boards – 18%
- Exc. Circs – 18%

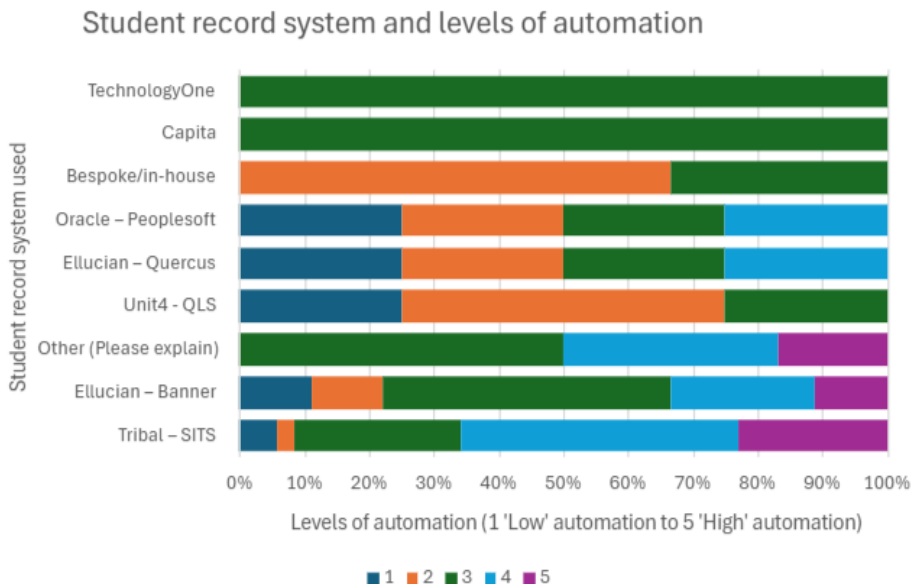
Survey Insights: systems use to apply regulations

Your current use of systems to apply regulations? (1 not much system automation, 5 high level of system automation)

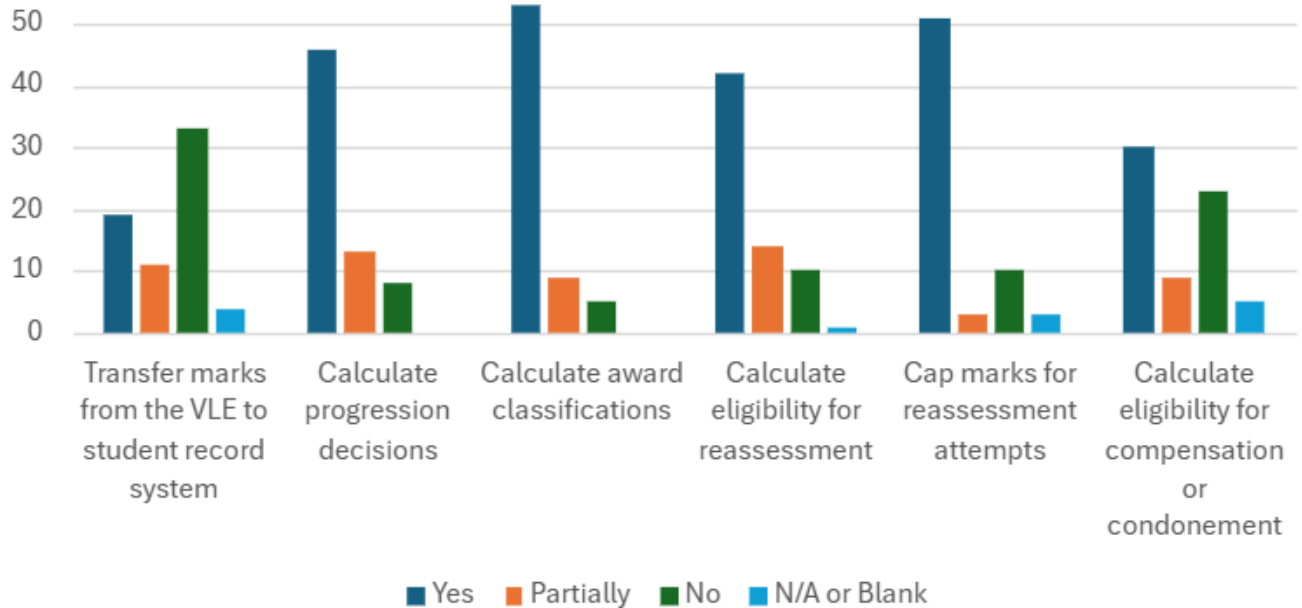


Survey Insights: student record system and automation

NOTE: data skewed because of high volume of responded using SITS (51%)



Survey Insights: configuring regulations in systems



Survey Insights: systems use in exam board management

Emerging analysis

Benefits

- Improved efficiency
- Improved decision-making / consistency
- Reduced workload
- Quicker processing

Challenges

- Complex regulations or student circumstances
- Decision-making structures
- External factors
- Resources – financial & time
- Manual workload
- Staff culture
- IT systems development & support
- System constraints
- Technical knowledge

Survey Insights: Systems challenges (specific)

Emerging analysis - highlights

- **IT systems development & support**

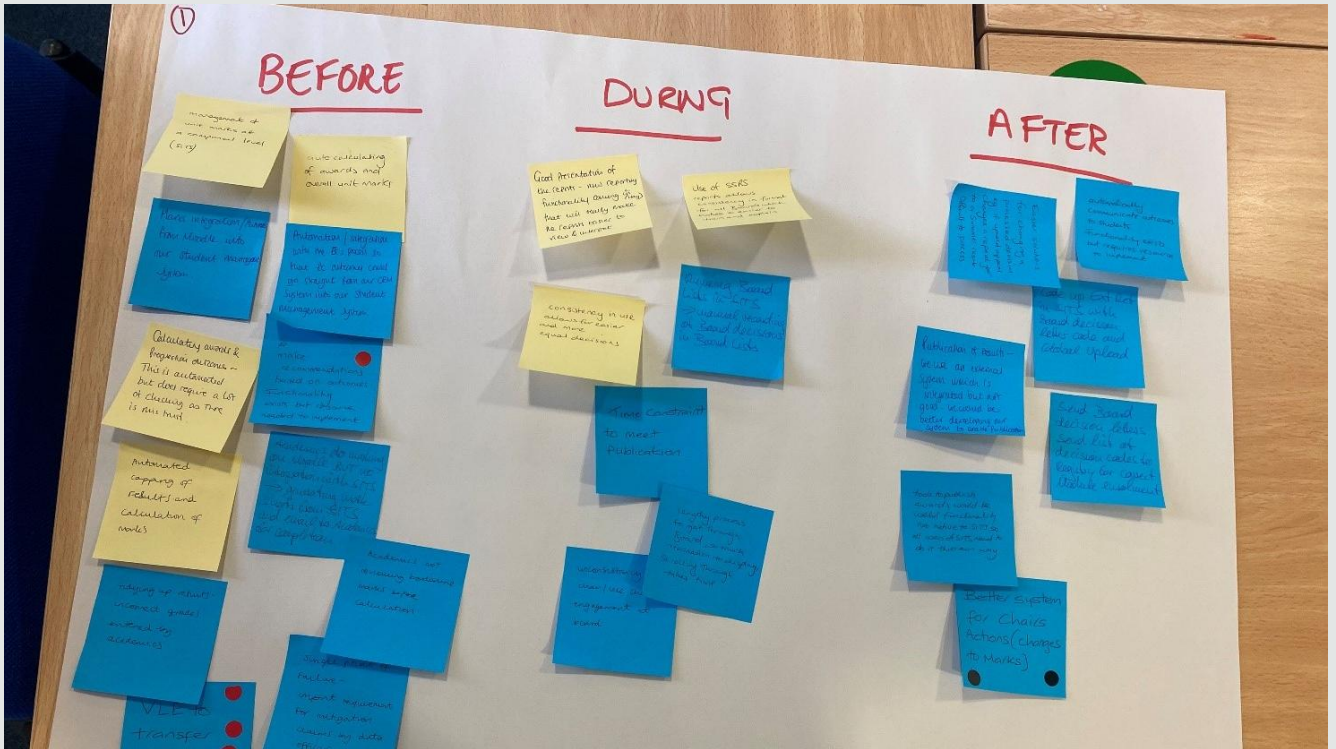
- Competing demands
- Slow Progress
- Bugs

- **Systems constraints**

- Integrations complicated
- Reporting capabilities
- Configuring complex regulations

- **Technical knowledge**

- Translation of policy & systems
- Technical expertise
- Microsoft Excel



SROC Insights: Using systems

Before exam boards

Good use

- 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

Future use

- All of the good things!
- Penalties
- Reassessment

During exam boards

Good use

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

Future use

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

After exam boards

Good use

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

Future use

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

SROC insights: which changes could be quick wins for you?

- Direct data feed of marks from VLE***
- Confirm decisions during the board on the system***
- Better system for changes to marks/chairs actions**
- Error reporting*
- Restrict changes after mark entry deadline*
- System to match the student's achievement against available exit awards in priority order*
- Automation of exceptional circumstances deferrals*
- Options for appropriate outcomes*
- Automation for alternative degree algorithm*
- Clear student profile in exam board report*
- Better reporting for the board*
- Post-board processing using automation*
- Continuous improvement approach*
- Faster processing when releasing results*

SROC insights: which changes could have the biggest impact?

- Integration of the student record system with the VLE to transfer marks*****
 - (noting component level more difficult and complex assessment patterns)
- Train, embed and explain the why, the how to academics too****
- Regulations are not definitive / too complicated / change regularly. Imprecise wording can't be coded. Need to improve regulations to support system.****
- Results sent directly from the system/same system/improved communication/move away from all-or-nothing****
- Using system to calculate recommended outcomes / better algorithms**
- Removal of module results board**
- Standardised programme/school boards*
- Systems development to keep up with changes*
- Reporting system performances needs to be better*

THE FUTURE OF EXAM BOARDS

- ARC Utopia

ARC Exam Board Utopia

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 over-arching 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.

ARC Exam Board Utopia

Utopia 5

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

NEXT STEPS

- Analysis on-going
- Written outputs on the webpage
- Autumn workshop
- ARC Annual Conference 2025 (TBC)

Next steps – written outputs

Information sheets

Themed summaries of insights

1. External examiners
2. Independent advisers
3. Training approaches
4. System use
5. Membership
6. Exam board models

Institutional summaries

1. Kingston: online module ratification and PAB Externals
2. Sunderland: University-level exam boards
3. Leeds: consolidation change after covid
4. Arden: changing boards as part of a student record system implementation
5. Bristol: changing boards as part of new academic structures
6. Wolverhampton: removing boards

These will be the first to be developed and further ones requested arising from survey analysis.

Form the basis of an autumn workshop “Delivering changes to exam boards”

Follow the project

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

charlotte.verney@bristol.ac.uk

michaela.pittom@kingston.ac.uk