

THE FUTURE OF EXAM BOARDS

*Workshop at Academic Registrar's Council
Conference, 5 November 2024*

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Overview

Objective: To explore and envision ideal future processes and structures of exam boards and what may need to happen in practice for this to be possible.

- Why do we need exam boards?
- Utopian future
- How to make it happen

Consent

- Data generated, through padlet, discussion notes, will be anonymous to us as the researchers/facilitators.
- Participation is deemed to be consent – if you do not wish a specific comment to be captured as research data, please inform us immediately after the workshop.

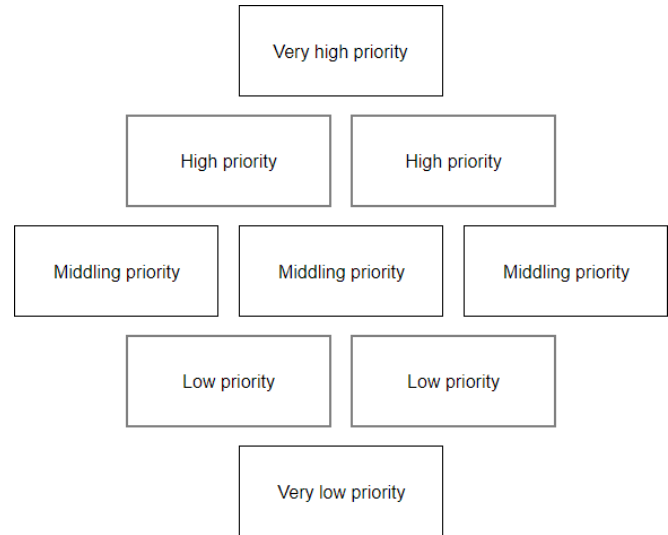
Activity 1 - Why would we want an exam board?

Step 1

- Write down the reasons why we need exam boards
- One reason per post-it

Step 2

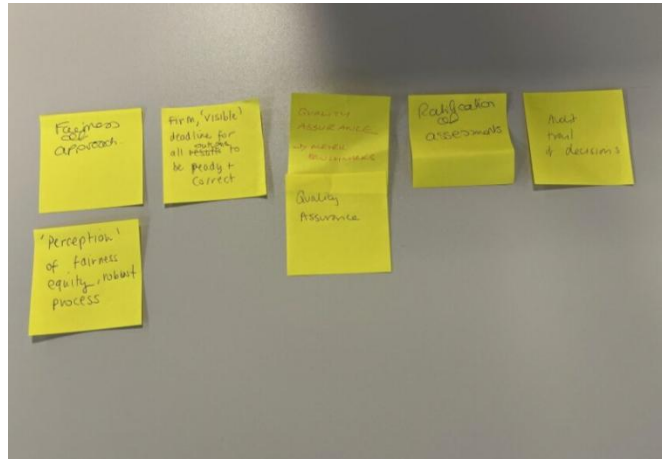
- Rank the reasons from your table



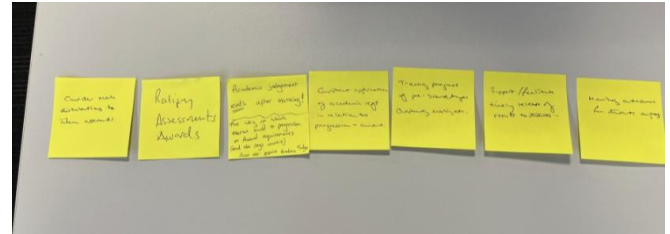
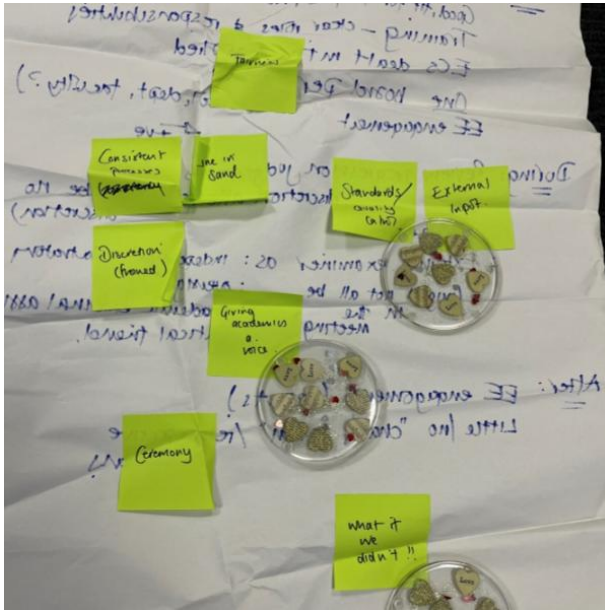
Groups 2 – Why would we want an exam board?

Facilitator notes:

- Why want an exam board- us unis don't believe in them
- Firm visible deadline, everything ready and correct
- Ratify assessments
- Functional
- Benchmark- QA review, discussion about awarding gaps
- All the people together for rich conversations- is the board the place these discussions re data
- Audit trail decisions
- Stops mad things happening
- Academics come together
- Has to go through board- governance
- Performative? External demo of quality
- External- critical friend? No real new feedback, what is the value, use externals for more value/ activity eg. sampling
- Space to discuss student cases
- Marker in sand for award and grad
- Boards are not providing quality assurance
- Could offer more operational flexibility
- Locally faculty can organise resits at same time



Groups 3, 4, 5 – Why would we want an exam board?



- Accountability/ responsibility and maintenance of academic standards (arrow drawn between them)
- module adjustments if not standard
- “The Final Check” anything that stands out check by exception
- borderline cases/ decision (?)
- “academic judgement”
- external approval (of weird decisions)

Activity- The Utopian Exam Board

What would this dream exam board look like?

- Purpose- what does it do/ not do?
- What should be included?
- Any activity which would sit outside of the board?
- How is core activity carried out?

Think beyond the exam board meeting- what would take place before and after? How should these be done?

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



Summarise your utopia and the key features

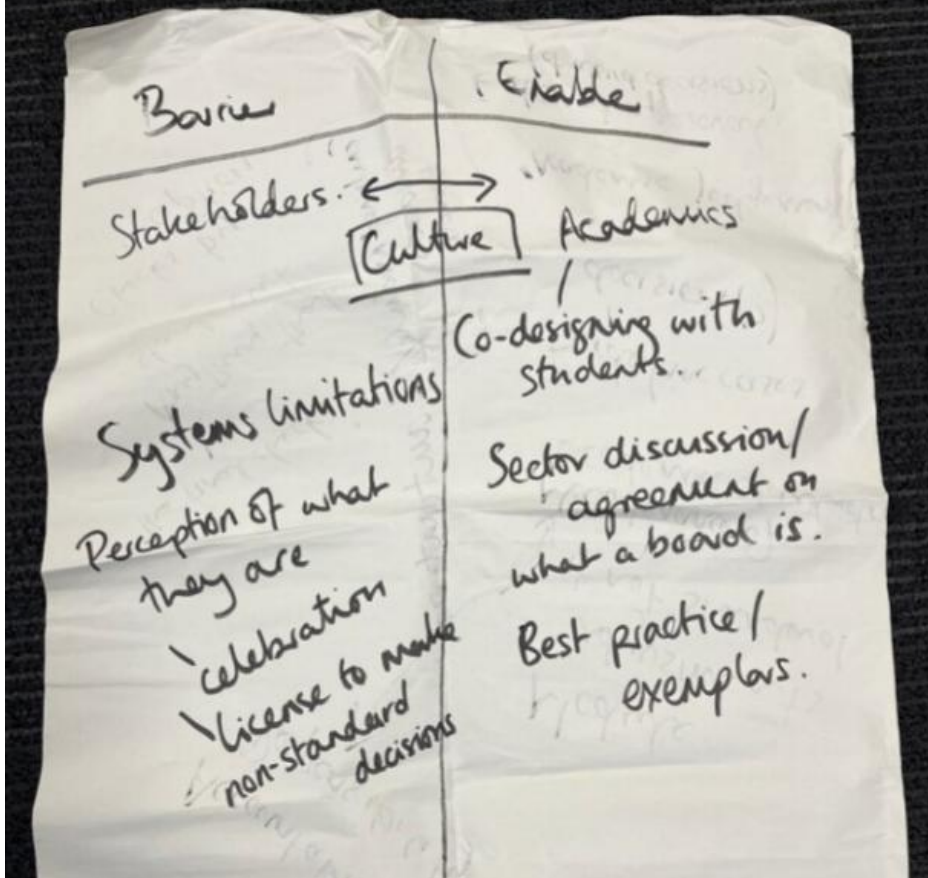
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What would need to be in place for your utopia to be possible?

- What would be the biggest enabler?
- What would be the biggest barrier?

Think about your needs at an institutional level and a sector level





Feedback in three words or one sentence soundbite

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Next steps

Survey re-open so that we can map more of the sector

Institutional summaries of exam board practice and innovation – from Spring 2025

Practice-sharing workshops to explore themes, challenges, and what the future could look like – from Spring 2025

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 think we should be covering in the project:

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