



About University of Sunderland

Institution Size	20,000 students	Student Record System	SITS
Exam Board Structure		Virtual Learning Environment	Canvas

Project Overview

In 2024, the University of Sunderland launched University Programme Assessment Boards (UPABs), following an 18-month project led by Programme Administration to automate regulatory calculations. This shift allowed Board members to focus on the nuanced, discretionary decisions for students with complex profiles, as the system handled routine calculations. Trials of the new UPABs in June, September and October reviewed the outcomes of over 3,000 students, enhancing consistency and efficiency. The success of these trials informed the drafting of UPAB Terms of Reference, setting the foundation for a more streamlined, centralised assessment board process.

The UPAB initiative aims for consistent, fair, and efficient decision-making for students by centralising Assessment Boards and automating routine calculations. This model boosts accuracy and streamlines processes, enabling faculty and Programme Leaders to focus on complex cases. With automation handling standard cases, UPABs ensure a higher quality of fair outcomes for students across the University. The University of Sunderland's move to UPABs marks a significant improvement in how we manage Assessment Boards, ensuring that our processes are student-centred and quality focused.

The UPAB model has brought several advantages:

- **Increased Efficiency and Focused Discussion:** By automating standard decisions, the Boards can dedicate time to ensure fairness for profiles where discretion can be applied.
- **Time saving:** Reduced meeting burden, replacing 20 individual meetings with the first four UPABs.
- **Enhanced Accuracy and Consistency:** Automation reduced manual errors and streamlined the overall process, providing a higher level of accuracy in student records.
- **Collaboration and Quality Assurance:** External Examiners' participation strengthened the quality assurance process, and feedback from them and staff have been supportive, highlighting the Board's commitment to transparent, equitable decision-making.

Contact Information

For any questions or clarifications, please reach out to:

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Delivering the change

University of Sunderland embarked on this journey starting in 2022

1) System Development and Automation

After a dedicated 18-month period of system development, including automating regulatory-bound decisions within the student records system, ensuring that regulatory calculations were correct and allowing the Board members to focus on nuanced cases. The automation has so far achieved around 71% automated decision-making, significantly reducing the discussion time at Boards and enhancing accuracy.

2) Trial Boards and Progressive Scope

The first trial UPAB, held in June 2024, focused on non-PSRB governed BA undergraduate programmes on the Sunderland campus. In September, the trial expanded to include BA and BSc programmes across Sunderland and TNE, and by October, non-PSRB governed postgraduate programmes were added. Each Board included the active involvement of the Chair (PVC Learning and Teaching), Programme Leaders and Associate Head of Schools, who presented profiles and engaged in detailed decision making. Additionally, External Examiners attended these Boards, offering positive feedback and recommendations for improvement.

3) Consultation and Governance

Based on feedback and lessons learned, the first two trials shaped the UPAB Terms of Reference, which underwent comprehensive academic and administrative consultations before Academic Board approval in October 2024. During the 2024/25 transition year, the UPAB Terms of Reference will run alongside the existing Module and Programme Assessment Board Terms of Reference, with full adoption planned for 2025/26. The transition also included the nomination of UPAB Chairs, who bring valuable oversight to this new framework.

4) Next steps

While we are already seeing the advantages of the transition to UPABs we still only at the beginning of the transition year and therefore there is still more to learn and more advantages to be achieved. As the UPAB model progresses, additional automation will be developed to encompass provisions governed by programme specific regulations across Sunderland, TNE, and Sunderland Online. Furthermore, a comprehensive report is underway to provide UPAB members with detailed insights into both non-discretionary automated decisions and cases requiring Board discussion, this transition year will continue to refine pre- and post- Board processes, aiming to further reduce result release timelines without compromising academic quality. Please see infographic at the end of this summary for an outline of the current UPAB stages.

Key reflections

1. **Dedicated Project Time:** Allocating time for system development and testing was essential, allowing gradual adoption and adjustments through trial boards.
2. **Prioritise Milestones and Deadlines:** Managing timelines was crucial for ensuring that automation work and testing was completed in time for the aligning of provision into the UPABs
3. **Plan for Transition:** With the Terms of Reference running parallel to the previous assessment board model, we've ensured a smooth transition, allowing time to embed UPAB practices fully by 2025/26.
4. **Value of Research and Collaboration:** Feedback and collaboration has been invaluable in shaping the model, ensuring it meets regulatory standards effectively.

UPAB Process

This timeline outlines the key stages of the University Progression and Awards Board (UPAB) process. This is the process during our transition year 2024/25 which is being continually refined.



4-6 weeks before meeting

Scoping

Provision to be included in the UPAB is scoped.

Before meeting

Decision Calculation

Programme Administration use automated regulations to calculate decisions for students within the student records system. Profiles to be considered by the UPAB for decision are flagged by the system

Before meeting

Module Results

Module Leaders complete marking processes and enter marks. Programme Administration produce module results papers, which are agreed asynchronously.

Before meeting

Pre-Board Review

Programme Leaders review student profiles for both regulatory-bound decisions and those requiring UPAB consideration.

Specific date

UPAB Meeting

The UPAB ore Board takes place, attended by the Chair and Officers the day before the UPAB.

The UPAB takes place.

Post meeting

Results are processed and published typically within 48 hours

UPAB

UPABs involve scoping, asynchronous review, automated regulatory calculations and a Board meeting for discretionary decisions.