

# ECA Board of Studies Practice and Reflections

Exploring the culture of the University's Board of Studies  
Board of Studies Network Event, 12 December 2023

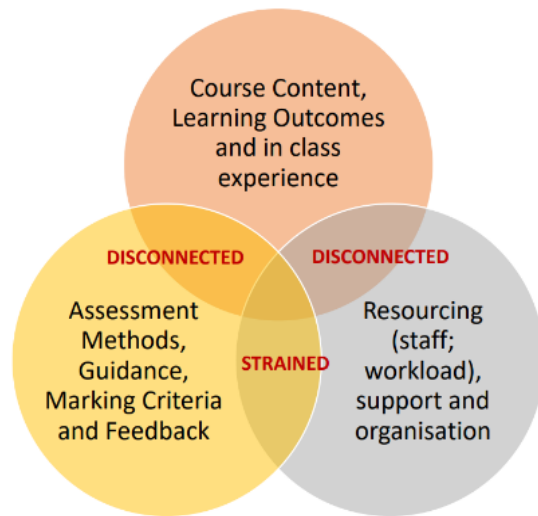
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# Board of Studies Culture?

- The premise of the BoS Network event:
  - Recent feedback has suggested that there is ‘hidden’, or unclear, set of practices, etiquette, and expectations for those participating in Board of Studies
  - What kind of culture do we want to promote going forward in a Board of Studies?
  - What challenges could be encountered in realising this culture?
  - What kind of etiquette should we all expect in a Board of Studies? What is acceptable/unacceptable behaviour?
  - How can we ensure that an appropriate etiquette/code of conduct/ground rules is enacted in a Board of Studies without being dictatorial?
- Should we have to ask such questions when conduct is regulated by the UoE’s Dignity and Respect Policy?
- Why do these questions arise in the first place?
- How might the impression of ‘dictatorial’ behaviour or ‘hidden’ rules arise (which imply staff perceptions of lack of fairness, transparency and negative personal feelings)?

# Possible reasons for negative perception of Boards of Studies?

## The root of the problem ....



- Academic Autonomy
- Pedagogic Training and Resources – programme and course (and assessment design)
- Time for review and development of assessment design, guidance and criteria/rubrics
- Concerns regarding Academic Integrity
- Course Review Culture, Process and Schedule

The reasons are probably not so different from those that have been identified for UoE's low NSS results for teaching, assessment and feedback.

One might add to these

- Staff perception that teaching and leadership are not rewarded equally by the UoE as research, leading to less willingness to engage with curriculum approval tasks
- A lesser focus on teaching at the UoE historically and in Scotland more generally (e.g., as regards HEA qualifications)

Slide above from the presentation by Mary Brennan, CAHSS Dean of Education, *Reflections on the NSS 2023*, CAHSS Strategy and Management Committee, 31 October 2023

# What does a Board of Studies need?

- **Essentials:**
  - **A clear framework (process, criteria) and timeline that are applied consistently.**
  - **BoS members who work within that framework.**
- The framework is outlined in UoE and external policy and systems guidance:
  - The UoE's Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (pp. 6-8) outlines the following aspects of School Boards of Studies: Remit, Composition, Governance, Operation, as well as many aspects of curriculum validation.
  - Guidance on course and programme information to be entered into EUCLID/DRPS/Path: [CCAM - Information Captured | The University of Edinburgh](#) and [Degree Programme Specification | The University of Edinburgh](#).
  - Further guidance, e.g., the UoE Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities, EDI policy, Graduate Attributes Framework, Strategy 2030.
  - External guidance, in particular the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statements and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).
- The timeline needs to be established with reference to College and UoE timelines, which are in turn based on national timelines for recruitment.

# Board of Studies Remit (Excerpt)

- ‘Each School has at least one Board of Studies which considers proposals for new, changes to, and/or closure of existing courses, programmes and awards. They cover all credit-bearing provisions, non-credit bearing online courses for external release, and non-credit bearing continuing professional development courses. They also keep teaching, learning and assessment methodologies under review and offer advice on the School’s portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.’
- I.e., Boards of Studies play a key role in implementing Education-related policy and a strategic role in the development of teaching provision.
- ‘Boards of Studies ensure that proposals are academically appropriate and supported by evidence and documentation.’
- I.e., Boards of Studies are responsible for ensuring standards are met, which will necessitate requiring proposers to make amendments, supply missing documentation/evidence and may also result in rejection of proposals that are not academically appropriate by the standards of UoE policy.

# An Example of a UoE BoS: The ECA Board of Studies

# ECA BoS: Some Context

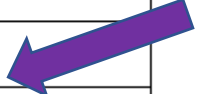
- Size: ECA is the largest School in UoE
  - 5 'Schools' = Subject Areas
  - 80+ distinct taught programmes
- Diversity:
  - From accredited programmes over highly focused disciplinary programmes to very open-ended programmes
  - On-campus and online
  - Lecture-based to highly practice-focused (physical making)
- Proposals: The ECA BoS transacts circa 100-130 proposals per year (in normal years, not counting minor course changes)
- 3 BoS meetings per year (in normal years), plus Programme Handbook sign-off

# ECA BoS: Timeline

The timeline is issued prior to the start of the academic year to enable planning of Subject Area approval timelines and workflow/workload planning for BoS members.

| SEMESTER 1    |                         |  |
|---------------|-------------------------|--|
| BoS MEETING 1 | Mo, 2 Oct (Week 3)      | Deadline: Submission of Subject Area curriculum development plans to BoS<br>Deadline: Submission of documentation to BoS for Meeting 1 |
|               | Th, 5 Oct – Th, 12 Oct  | BoS reps review documentation for BoS Meeting 1  |
|               | We, 18 Oct (Week 5)     | <b>BOARD OF STUDIES: MEETING 1</b>   |
|               |                         | <b>Focus:</b> Course proposals<br>Programme proposals and major DPT changes (UG)   |
|               |                         | <b>Additional:</b> Minor DPT changes, major course changes   |
|               | We, 25 Oct (Week 6)     | Deadline: Submission of revisions to BoS (programme proposals)   |
|               | Tu, 31 October (Week 7) | CAHSS Deadline: Programme proposals and major DPT changes (UG)   |
|               | Fr, 3 Nov (Week 7)      | Deadline: Submission of revisions to BoS (all other documentation)   |

Includes reference to deadlines above School level



ECA BoS Timeline 2023 (excerpt, key dates for Meeting 1)



# ECA BoS: Operationalisation

- Key Personnel

- BoS membership is governed by the Programme and Course Approval Policy and Management but some members are more heavily involved than others
- BoS Chair
- Education Secretary
- Subject Area Directors of Education (= BoS SA Reps): oversee/organise SA approval, submit proposals from their SAs, review proposals, oversee/organise revisions
- ECA Head of IT and Technical Services: reviews technical and facilities requirements
- ECA EDI Director: reviews EDI statements in programme and course proposals
- External member: spot-checks proposals and comments more generally
- Head of SASS: raises any administrative issues

- Infrastructure

- Microsoft Teams site (with distinct channels for different BoS meetings) to host documentation (blank forms, proposals, action tracker, etc.) and chat

# ECA BoS: Forms and Guidance

- All-Staff facing:
  - ECA BoS Timeline, Templates and Guidance for Minor and Major Course Changes, Course Proposals and Minor Programme Changes located on ECA Handbook (Sharepoint site)
  - Reference to this guidance is made in the ECA Course Organiser Handbook
  - College Templates and Guidance for Programme Proposals, Major Programme Changes and Programme Closure located on CAHSS Curriculum pages
- ECA BoS Member-facing:
  - Review forms for all proposal types (aside from Minor Programme Changes) located on ECA BoS Teams site
- Behind the Scenes:
  - UoE Guidance for SASS staff on DRPS information set-up and maintenance

# ECA BoS: A few noteworthy points

- ECA BoS proposal forms, guidance and review forms are made to fully align to each other
- Resourcing: The ECA BoS requires approval of
  - Staff resourcing according to CAHSS WAM tariffs
  - All IT, facilities and technical resourcing beyond a lecture room and Office 365
- Due to the need to review and update existing courses, proposers have to update all main sections of Euclid course descriptors when proposing major course changes
- Some rules are in place to facilitate tracking and prevent approval complications; e.g., programme change proposals will not be reviewed unless relevant courses are already approved or proposals are submitted to the same BoS meeting

# ECA BoS: Process

- Pre-review
  - Request of ITTS Resourcing Report where required
  - Subject Area-level approval
  - Submission of proposals to BoS Teams site
- Review
  - Pre-screening of proposals
  - Allocation of proposals to reviewers
  - Asynchronous review by BoS SA Reps of allocated business and EDI Director of EDI statements
  - Review of all business by BoS Chair (as per UoE Policy, BoS Chair has 'casting vote')
- BoS Meeting
- Post-Review
  - BoS decisions communicated to proposers by Education Secretary via BoS SA Reps
  - Revisions submitted to BoS via BoS SA Reps, reviewed by BoS Chair
  - SASS staff instructed to action proposals once fully approved
- All stages tracked throughout

# ECA BoS: Meetings

- Decisions on proposals (approved without changes; approved subject to amendments; rejected and to be resubmitted; rejected – not feasible) are made in the asynchronous review process
- Part 1: Minutes, Chair's Communications, incl. updates on Education / QA-related matters from UoE, College and School committees
- Part 2: Announcement of BoS decisions
  - BoS Chair announces the decision for each proposal
  - Any BoS member can comment on any proposal and/or issues arising from it
- Part 3: Discussion of issues relevant to the BoS remit, i.e., strategic discussions of education-related policy and process, e.g., at the last meeting
  - SA-level curriculum approval practices
  - Strengthening student participation in curriculum
  - Aspects of the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy

# ECA BoS: Induction

- Induction preferences were discussed with BoS SA Reps; preference was for real-time induction rather than written guidance
- BoS Induction: Induction Meeting(s) at the beginning of the Academic Year
- Peer Induction: New BoS SA Reps are paired with continuing BoS SA reps for review

# ECA BoS: Subject Area Support

- ECA Handbook: Guidance and Forms continually available to all staff
- Subject Area sessions: presentations / workshops on guidance, forms, process, etc., open to all SA staff upon request of Head of SA or BoS SA Rep (= SA Director of Education)
- Feedback on SA Education-related plans
- Open drop-in sessions for working on BoS proposal for all Course Organisers/Programme Directors

# ECA BoS: Challenges

- Ensuring that essential information reaches all relevant staff
- Difficulty of getting staff (especially Course Organisers and Programme Directors) to engage consistently with guidance, process, timelines and ECA BoS feedback
- Resistance to the remit/authority of the BoS, resulting in the need for difficult conversations
- Workload



# ECA BoS: Some Reflections

- The challenges the ECA BoS encounters are probably not unique in the UoE
- In order to support Boards of Studies around the UoE to fully enact the responsibilities arising from their remit, we need
  - Academic colleagues to understand and respect
    - That curriculum approval and maintenance is subject to governmental, institutional, College and School policy
    - The tremendous SASS effort required to facilitate teaching
  - To strengthen the agency of SA-level role holders
  - Increase the profile of Education-related roles