



THE FUTURE OF EXAM BOARDS

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Workshop structure & goals

- 90-minute workshop

Goals

- To share goals and initial insights from The Future of Exam Boards project
- To provide a practice-sharing space for civil engineering leads to discuss exam boards
- To generate insight and data for the project

Consent

Data generated, through menti-meter, discussion notes, individual reflections, 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.

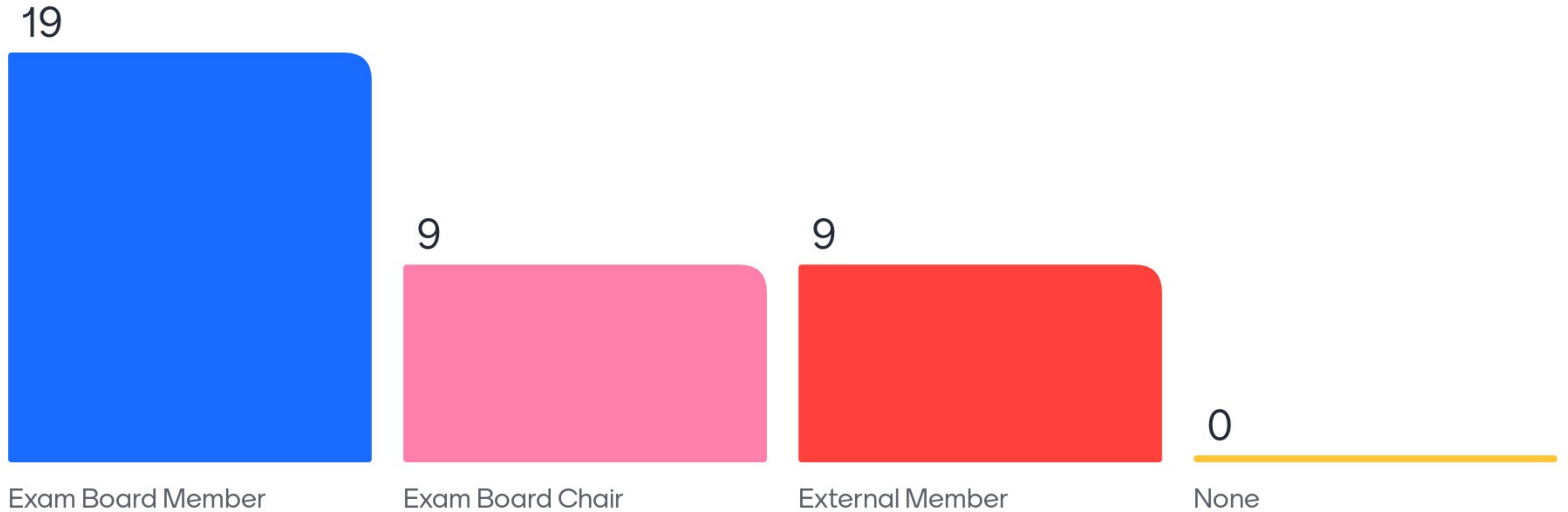


**Who is here
today?**

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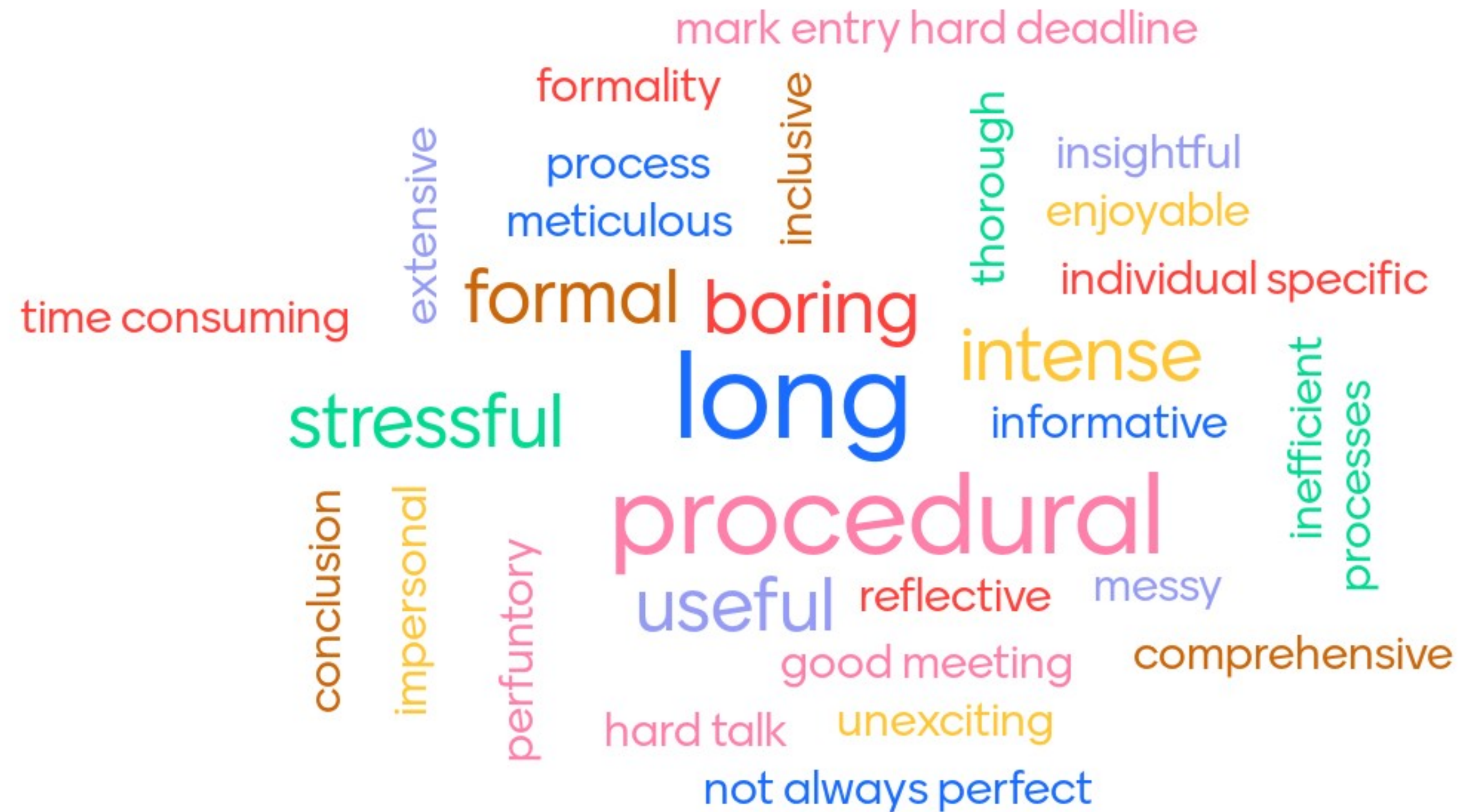
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Which of the following roles do you have in any type of exam board? (select all that apply)



Describe your exam boards in one word (up to 3 entries)

43 responses



How do exam boards make you feel? (one word)

29 responses



How administrators described exam boards

ARC Assessment Practitioners Group Nov.2023



How administrators feel about exam boards

ARC Assessment Practitioners Group Nov.2023



Why should we think about exam boards?

Verney, C. (2022) *Explaining changes in higher education administrative work, influence, and authority: an examination of assessment administration in English higher education*. EdD thesis, University of Nottingham.

- **Exam board decisions are complex decisions**

They are the end-point of a series decisions and processes that must all be completed before a decision can be taken; and the outcomes of earlier decisions impacts what options are available to exam boards.

- **Making exam board decisions has become more operationally/logistically complex**

Larger student numbers, tighter processing timescales, multiple decision points in a year, and this core activity taking place alongside other core activities such as teaching, new types of provision – partnership and apprenticeships.

- **Attempts to streamline exam boards take different forms and changes the nature of work**

Removing decisions from the exam boards, standardising or simplifying criteria for decisions, making better use of technology

Exam board work is often experienced negatively

Verney, C. (2022) *Explaining changes in higher education administrative work, influence, and authority: an examination of assessment administration in English higher education*. EdD thesis, University of Nottingham.

- Exam board administration felt to be invisible

"It's such a big core function of the University, but it's not necessarily given the value it deserves. It's almost like it just happens as a kind of administrative process."

- Exam boards often the most challenging part of delivering assessment-related administration

"It's probably ensuring that everything is done for the Boards of Examiners. So, it's probably a capacity/time thing, and having to rely on another people to have met deadlines."

- Ambiguous and uncomfortable administrative role

"Telling the exam board chairs that they can or can't do things, or usually that they can't do things that they're wanting to do, something that's against the regulations"

Do exam boards have an identity crisis?

Verney, C. (2022) *Explaining changes in higher education administrative work, influence, and authority: an examination of assessment administration in English higher education*. EdD thesis, University of Nottingham.

- Has the purpose of an exam board changed?
- Are we clear as a sector why we have them?
- Who holds the knowledge required to make exam board decisions?
- Have we been tinkering with a system that needs a full re-design?

There is a need to re-evaluate and re-confirm the purpose of an exam board, the knowledge required, who holds or needs to hold that knowledge, and then design appropriate processes and systems needed to support it.

From discussions in the sector

Academic Registrar's Council

- There is mixed practice, yet shared challenges across the UK sector
- Institutions are responding to challenges with exam boards in different ways
- There is a clear desire to want to improve this space
- There is no clear language to describe different models that exist or that are emerging
- There is no documented practice, or clear practice-sharing space in the sector, and the work to deliver exam boards is often invisible

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, University of Law, 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'?

QAA Project overview

Phase 1: Survey of exam board practice – NOW OPEN

The purpose of the survey is to build an evidence-base of existing sector practice in exam boards to inform resources and guidance.

Through the Academic Registrar's Council representative to provide an institutional picture.

Covers: current practice, changes to exam boards, institutional context

Phase 2: Institutional summaries of practice (from Spring 2025)

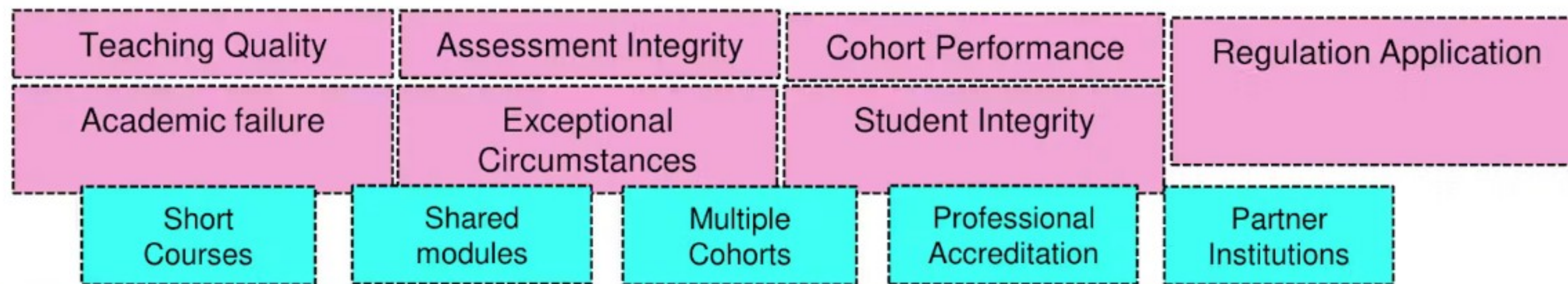
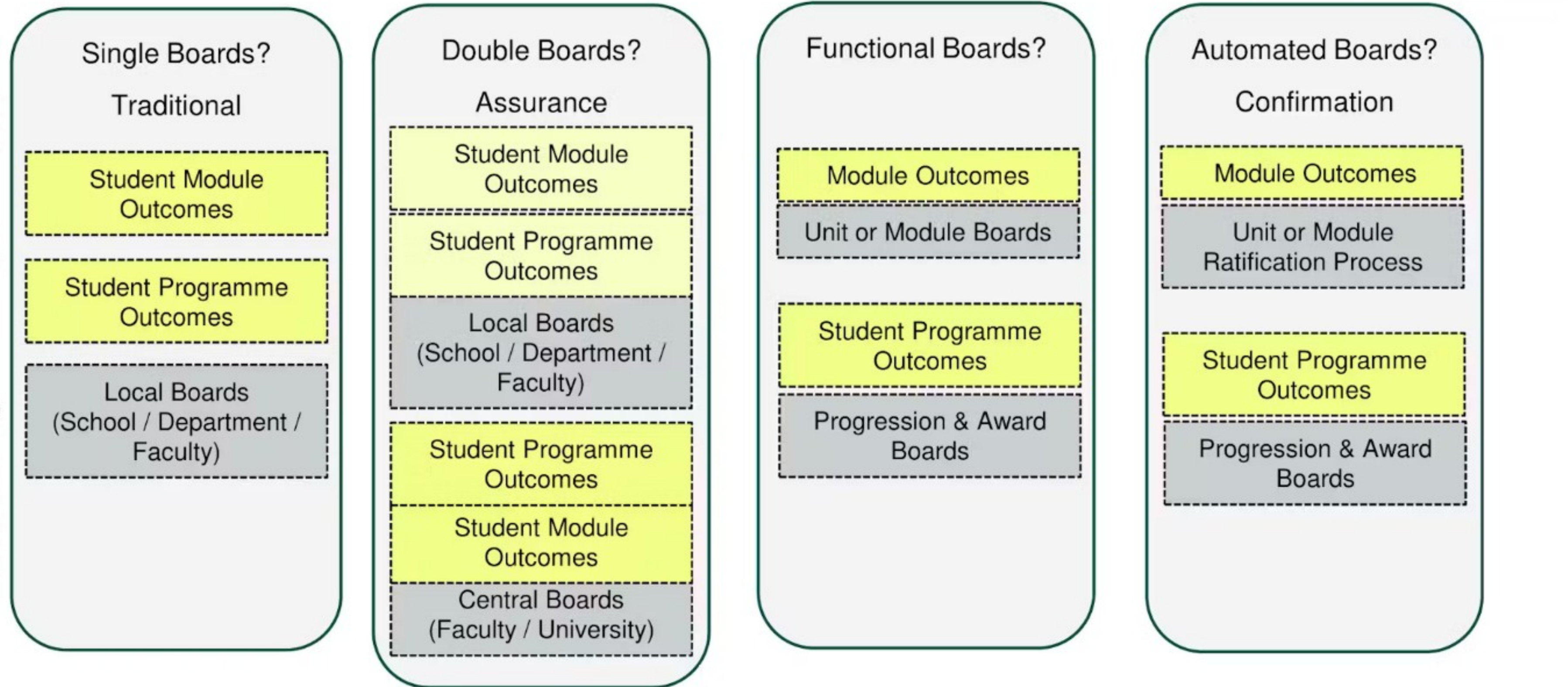
Characteristics of typical exam board models; examples and experiences of changing exam board practices.

Phase 3: Practice-sharing workshops (from Spring 2025)

To explore themes, challenges, innovations, and what the future could look like.

Current practice?

Confirming student outcomes



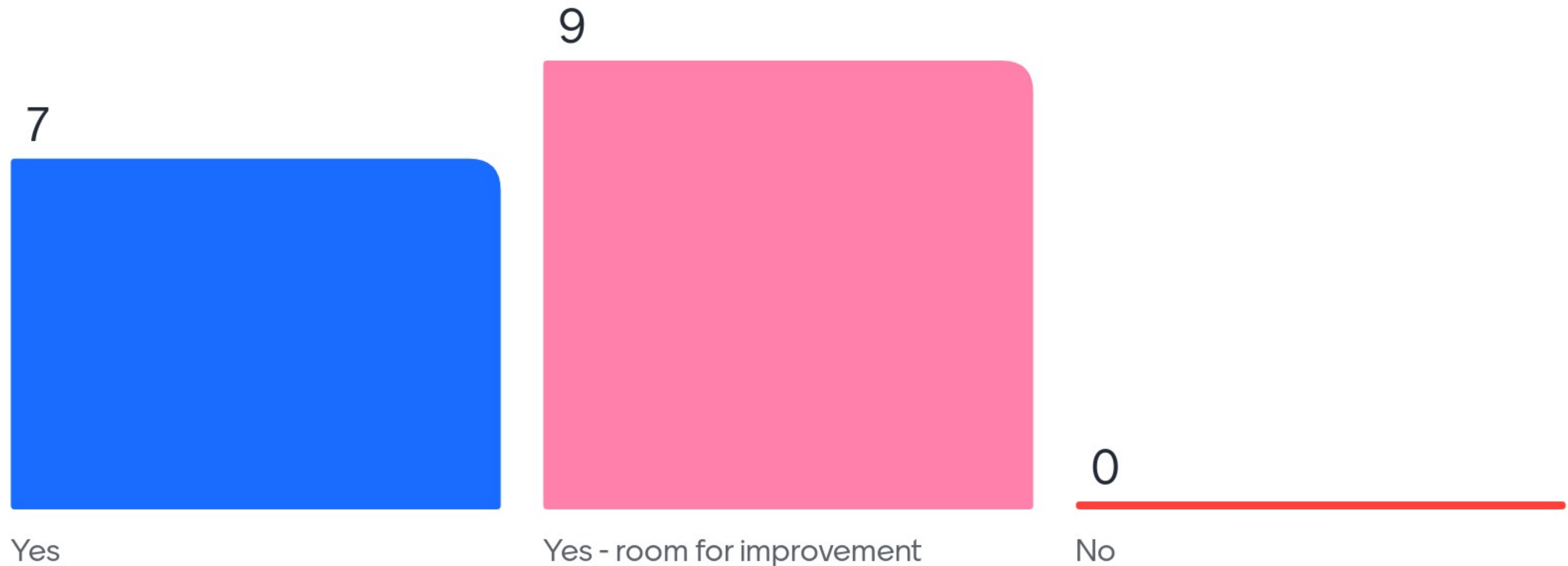


**A few questions
about your exam
boards**

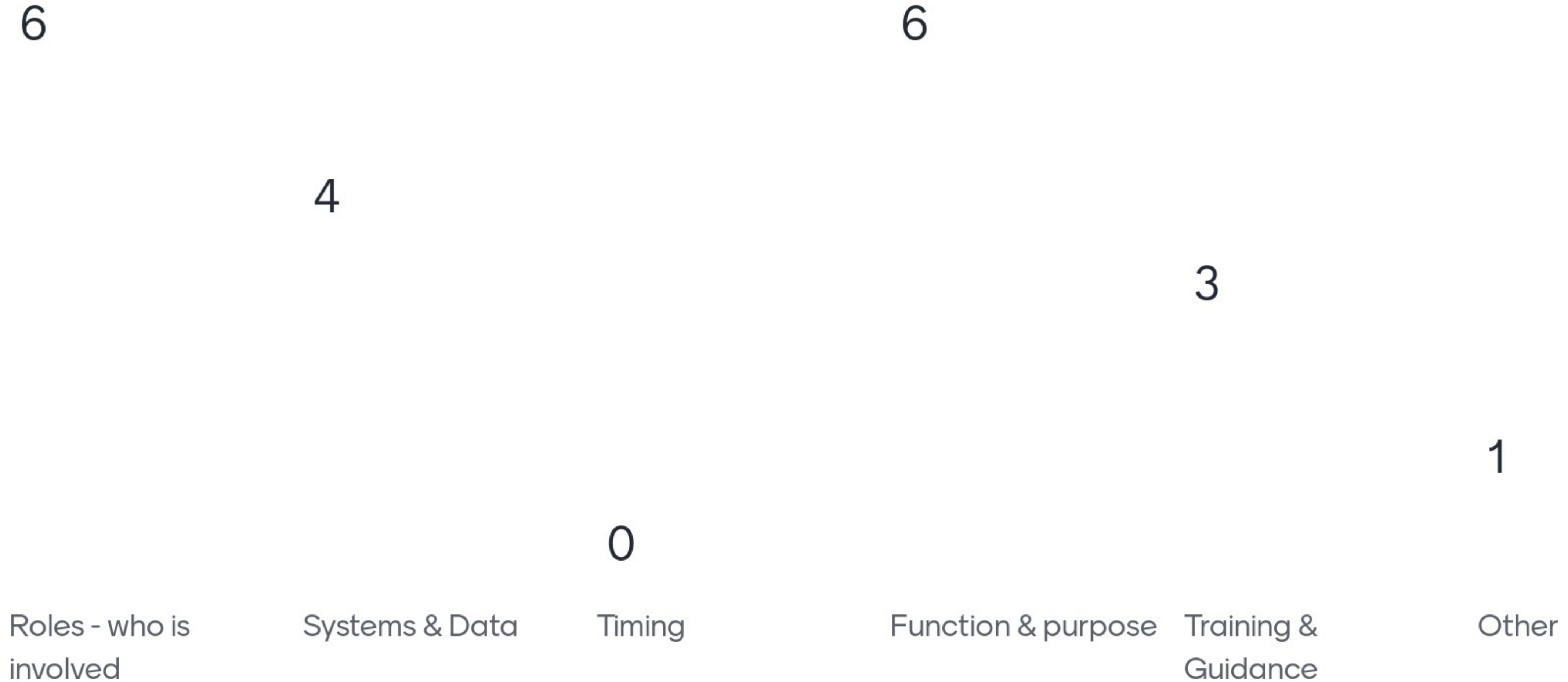
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Do you think your current exam boards work well?



What works well? (up to 3)



What could work better? (up to 3)

10

2

2

3

2

1

Roles - who is
involved

Systems & Data

Timing

Function & purpose

Training &
Guidance

Other

3



20



What is the biggest challenge for you?

The preboard

Stay

Dragging of issues.

Disagreement with some
of the school conventions

In my experience exam
boards run well

Correct and complete
data

Having all the relevant
information about the
student's circumstances

Tight schedules

What is the biggest challenge for you?

Staying focused and on time

Keeping any personal conflicts around educational approaches away from the room.

Student results not being presented properly, missing or not calculated.

The checking procedure before is the hardest and is time consuming. Once we arrive at the Exam Board it should be fairly straightforward

Precision required in the preparation for pre board in limited time.

Ensuring that the "trickier" cases are correctly and fairly processed.

As chair....when staff are not sufficiently familiar with regulations

Submitting marks within required timescales

What is the biggest challenge for you?

Time pressure to prepare for an Exam board, from moderation to sharing if samples to EE, to completing course results sheets and time spent at and after the board

Maintaining anonymity and fairness e.g where some tutors want to advocate on behalf of their tutees

External Examiners' feedback

Group Discussion 1 – quick intro

- **Exam board practice within your institution (10 mins)**

- What is the purpose of exam boards in your institution?
- What model do you have?
- What works well?
- What is challenging?

Feedback: One point from each table – what was most interesting from these discussions?

Group Discussion 2

- **Exam board change within your institution (10 mins)**
 - What changes have you seen in exam boards at your institution?
 - What specific changes to exam board practices have been introduced at your institution?
 - How did this go?
 - How could the change have been delivered differently?

Feedback: Two points – how has your thinking about exam boards changed from this discussion?

Feedback: are there any lessons about how to manage changes to exam board well?

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Group Discussion 3

- **The future of exam boards (15 mins)**

- In an ideal world, what would exam boards look like?
 - What is its purpose?
 - Who needs to be involved – and why?
- What would need to change (in the sector or institution) to make this happen

Feedback: Your table's utopian vision

Concluding reflections

- What are your key take aways from today?
- What, if anything, has made you think differently about your exam boards from today?
- What could you change at your own institution to improve your exam boards?

Thank you !

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

Follow Charlotte on LinkedIn for updates

Get in touch with Charlotte if there are areas of exam board practice that you think we should be covering in the project:

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