

## QUALITY ASSURANCE MONITORING AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

### Final Overview of Matters Noted in External Examiner Reports 2013/14

#### Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide Quality Assurance Monitoring and Review Committee with an overview of common University themes emerging from matters noted in external examiner reports in 2013/14.

#### Background

2. Every year Academic Quality carries out a review of all external examiner reports received. The aim of this review is draw out common themes or highlight any issues to be noted at an institutional level. This ensures that any matters of good practice across programmes can be disseminated widely and that any matter that might need to be addressed at a University level can be considered.
3. In light of staff feedback received at the previous Quality Assurance Monitoring and Review Committee meeting on 19 September with regards to the timing of this report, Academic Quality will in future only produce one report per year comprising university themes from all external examiner reports received, instead of two separate reports. As a result, Academic Quality will submit one final overview report of matters noted in external examiner reports 2014/15 to the second meeting of this Committee in 2015/16.
4. This paper covers matters noted in fifty two external examiner reports for both Undergraduate and Taught Masters provision in 2013/14 as received after 31 August 2014. Themes mentioned in this report are solely universal themes which were found in all three faculties.
5. The UK Quality Code, section B7 External Examining, sets out indicators of sound practice. Indicator 15 states that:

*'At both institutional and subject/programme level, institutions give full and serious consideration to the comments and recommendations contained in external examiners' reports. The actions taken as a result of reports, or the reasons for not taking action, are formally recorded and circulated to those concerned.'*

6. After reports are received and reviewed by Academic Quality they are sent to the appropriate faculty. Faculties are then requested to circulate the report to the relevant Head of School (module reports), or the Programme Leader and Head of School (combined module and programme reports).

7. The report is then reviewed by appropriate staff to identify any issues raised that require investigation and consideration. An appropriate response to each matter or recommendation must then be agreed and sent to the external examiner. In doing this:
  - The response must include the action to be taken to address each matter or recommendation.
  - If the matter or recommendation relates to resourcing this must be alerted to, and acknowledged by, the Dean of Faculty.
  - If the matter or recommendation raised in the report relates to the assessment process, the response must be sent to the external examiner within four weeks of the date of receiving the report from Academic Quality.
  - All responses must be approved by the Dean of Faculty/Assistant Dean before being sent to the external examiner.
8. Please note that this paper is not designed to investigate faculty or school specific themes, as these should be considered via annual monitoring activities. However, to assist each faculty/school with their annual monitoring, Academic Quality can share respective summary spreadsheets of good practice and recommendations. If you wish to receive such a summary for your faculty/school please contact Academic Quality.
9. The Committee is reminded that it agreed at its 30 November 2012 meeting that faculties would continue to keep their own formal notes of actions taken and responses sent to external examiners as required by the UK Quality Code.
10. In addition to the above, matters raised by external examiners will be considered through the routine monitoring procedures as set out in the University Quality Framework.
11. This report is designed to meet the requirements of the UK Quality Code, chapter B7 external examining Indicator 15 that,

*'At institutional level the general issues and themes arising from the [external examiner] reports are reviewed'.*

#### **Alignment to strategic objectives or external policy driver**

12. This paper supports the University's strategic objectives to be academically excellent and to achieve the highest organisational standards.

### **Summary of key areas for discussion and options**

13. The overview presented discusses both good practice and recommendations arising from external examiner reports in 2013/14 received after 31 August 2014.

### **Resource implications**

14. As the consideration of external examiner reports are embedded as a key activity within schools, faculties and Academic Quality there are no additional resource implications for the Committee to take into account.

### **Equality considerations**

15. Consideration of external examiner reports is not a new development. Consequently an equality impact assessment is not required to be undertaken in relation to matters discussed in this paper.

### **Communication**

16. There are no restrictions regarding circulation of the content of this paper.

### **Recommendation**

17. Quality Assurance Monitoring and Review Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the overview of matters noted in the external examiner reports for 2013/14 received after 31 August 2014.
- b) Faculty representatives to consider whether Academic Quality should undertake some research in 2014/15 with a view to producing a guidance note on minimum information for external examiners to help to improve consistency and standardisation of information.
- c) Faculty representatives to disseminate the report to the appropriate faculty-level committee and consider whether any action needs to be taken to either spread good practice or address any items for further consideration.

**P Klawitter  
Academic Quality  
26 November 2014**

## Final Overview of Matters Noted in External Examiner Reports 2013/14

1. In alignment with the UK Quality Code this paper is the means by which the University considers any general themes and issues that have arisen from external examiner reports from across the university for 2013/14 received after 31 August 2014.

### **Report Section B**

2. Section B of the external examiner report template asks external examiners to confirm that the following standards have been met:

#### **Academic Issues**

Is the academic standard of each module or programme of study being considered set and maintained at the appropriate level?

#### **Student Performance**

Are the standards of student performance properly judged against the level set?

#### **Assessment**

Is the assessment process appropriate, rigorous, equitable and conducted in accordance with University guidance?

#### **Comparable Standards**

Is the standard and level of student achievement comparable with those in other higher education institutions?

3. As was the case last year, external examiners reported that the quality and standards of programmes at Edinburgh Napier compared favourably to other institutions within the UK. The reports overwhelmingly confirmed that the four specified standards had been met in 2013/14.
4. Out of fifty two reports received all examiners agreed that the four main standards listed above had been met.

### **Report section C**

5. Section C of the report template gives external examiners an opportunity to comment in more detail on the areas of comparability, academic issues, student performance, learning teaching and assessment, recommendations and good practice.
6. In considering all reports received after 31 August for academic year 2013/14, a number of universal themes emerged from across the University. Any issues identified that are specific to a programme are considered and addressed through the process described in paragraph seven of the cover paper and through the Quality Framework routine monitoring procedures.

## Good Practice

7. Of the fifty two external examiner reports received after 31 August by Academic Quality, most highlighted aspects of good practice present at the University. In order to promote the dissemination of good practice throughout the University the more common items of good practice are highlighted below:

### Feedback

8. External examiners in each faculty commented positively on the detailed and constructive feedback provided to students. Some reports also commended on the level of student support embedded into the teaching through feedback and regular encouragement for reflection. This universal theme is in line with last year's report outcomes, emphasising that feedback is an area of continuous improvement at Edinburgh Napier.
9. Some examples of good practice can be found below, please note that this is not an exhaustive list but is designed to capture feedback from across the University:

*'The feedback given to students is generally very extensive and developmental. Indeed, the feedback is generally more detailed and developmental compared to other HE institutions with which I am familiar.'*

*'The detail given in the feedback is enormous and the process gives clear evidence of where discussion/negotiation between markers has taken place – this is a common failing at other institutions.'*

*'Full and honest but supportive feedback is excellent. Self-assessment element is also a useful tool for encouraging reflective practice.'*

### Assessment

10. Similar to last year's reports, the variety of assessment methods were commended by external examiners in all three faculties. A few reports highlighted that the use of a range of learning and teaching strategies had positively affected student engagement within the modules.
11. A few positive examples from across the University are listed below, showcasing good practice with regards to assessment methods:

*'Overall good practice is endemic – some good use of different learning strategies – e.g. presentations as well as written submissions.'*

*'Good practice is seen in various ways – in its design and operation of the programme and in the variety of assessment methods used.'*

*'It was really interesting to see the creative ways in which students were encouraged to demonstrate their understanding of both theory and practice in their assignments through a variety of methods, including animations, blogs, padlet, podcasts and infographics. This demonstrates the high level of*

*engagement by students in the programme which in turn reflects the commendable commitment of the programme team.'*

### **Information**

12. The level of information provided to students about their modules and assessments and consequently the information provided to external examiners were praised within reports in all three faculties. Some external examiners also commented favourably on the efficiency and administration of board of examiner meetings, reflecting similar themes from the 2012/13 reports.
13. One example of good practice from each faculty showcasing effective information provision is available below:

*'Module information sheets and course descriptions were exemplary – impeccably laid out with lots of detail.'*

*'The coursework briefs appear to adopt a uniform approach across the programme, detailing to the students what is required, when the assessment is due, and what the marking criteria used will be.'*

*'The written narrative provided by the module leaders was very helpful in understanding the context of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies in place.'*

### **Practical elements**

14. Across all three faculties external examiners remarked on the use of practical applications within learning and teaching strategies, preparing students for the world of work. A few reports also commented on how well theory and practice are linked up to reflect external body and industry requirements.
15. The statements below are a sample of good practice from across the institution, all referring to practical relevance:

*'It is refreshing to see an explicit emphasis on theory and the relationship with practice; such should be encouraged further.'*

*'I was impressed by the [...] module which succeeds in combining the theoretical with the practical in a very clever way.'*

*'The practical opportunities provided as part of the student learning experience.'*

## Items for further consideration

16. External examiners offered a range of constructive recommendations on areas for further development. The points mentioned below are not presented as major concerns. Many of the recommendations made by external examiners are particular to the programme or modules examined and are therefore not discussed in this paper.

### Moderation

17. Whilst many external examiners commented positively on the moderation of assessments, there were a number of cases where examiners reported that moderation had not been consistent. The University code of practice<sup>1</sup> specifies that moderation is designed to:

- a) ensure consistency and fairness of marking;
- b) ensure consistency in the interpretation and application of assessment performance standards;
- c) demonstrate inter- and intra-marker reliability;
- d) contribute to quality assurance and enhancement within the University;
- e) provide a self-assessment mechanism for individual lecturers.

18. Faculties and schools should note the examples below and consider whether they need to take any action to ensure consistency in moderation:

*‘One of my roles is about comparability between cohorts, modes of delivery and countries therefore consistency of assessment criteria and comments would be useful for me. For comparability, I would use the same assessment criteria whether the papers are on-line or from an overseas partner.’*

*‘The processes involved in double marking and internal moderation should be reviewed in order to ensure greater transparency and consistency.’*

*‘There is very little time built into the academic year programme between internal marking and moderation and the arrival of the external examiner. Can I suggest that more time is allocated to the internal moderation process, so that the marks are certain before the arrival of the external examiner?’*

### Administration and Information

19. Section B7 of the UK Quality code provides a pro forma of suggested materials for examiners. Some variability in the level of materials and documentation received by external examiners and the timing of this was raised in few external examiner reports from each faculty. One examiner suggested that dates for circulation of scripts should be communicated as soon as possible including any delays. It has also been highlighted by several examiners that the documentation

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment handbook, appendix e



for module assessments were not uniform, which would be desired for the benefit of both the students and externals.

20. Faculty members of the Committee are asked to consider whether Academic Quality should undertake some research in 2014/15 with a view to producing a guidance note on minimum information for external examiners to help to improve consistency and standardisation of information. Some examples of this are listed below:

*'All tutors could perhaps provide a short overview/ commentary on the running of the course and their insights on the overall performance.'*

*'It would be helpful to scrutinise a range of Dissertations. I was only sent two scripts, both marginal/borderline, so I am not in a position to comment on mid-to higher range work. This could be done the day prior to the assessment board to save postage.'*

*'Provision of an overall spreadsheet, showing all students and all module marks is recommended.'*

### **Assessment**

21. Similar to themes outlined in the overview report from 19 September, many external examiners commented positively on assessment and standardisation of feedback provision. The following recommendations are a sample of themes found in reports from across the institution:

*'I would recommend that standardisation of feedback would be helpful to students and also support greater consistency across modules.'*

*'Provide some anonymous examples of good and poor pieces of work [to students prior to their assessments] and encourage good referencing and use of theory within the answers.'*

*'Examination questions should be more straightforward and show the split of marking allocation.'*

*'I would re-iterate previous comments, that where work is of a high calibre staff should not be afraid to use the full range of marks.'*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

22. Overall the reports received after 31 August in 2013/14 confirm that the University can have confidence in the quality and academic standards of its provision. Appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor and consider external examiner comments and recommendations. Schools and faculties should consider the above and decide whether there is anything within the items for further consideration that needs action.



23. The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the overview of matters noted in the external examiner reports for 2013/14 received after 31 August.
- b) Faculty representatives to consider whether Academic Quality should undertake some research in 2014/15 with a view to producing a guidance note on minimum information for external examiners to help to improve consistency and standardisation of information.
- c) Faculty representatives to disseminate the report to the appropriate faculty-level committee and consider whether any action needs to be taken to either spread good practice or address any items for further consideration.

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