

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE MONITORING AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **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 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. This paper covers matters noted in one hundred and one external examiner reports for both Undergraduate and Taught Masters provision in 2013-14 as received by 31 August 2014.

4. The UK Quality Code, Chapter 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.'*

5. 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/programme reports).

6. 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 this e-mail.
- All responses must be approved by the Dean of Faculty/Assistant Dean before being sent to the external examiner.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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**

10. 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**

11. The overview presented discusses both good practice and recommendations arising from external examiner reports in 2013-14.

### **Resource implications**

12. 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**

13. 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**

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

### **Recommendation**

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

- a) Note the overview of matters noted in the external examiner reports for 2013-14.
- b) 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.

**Elise Russell  
Academic Quality Advisor**

**12 September 2014**

## 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.

### Standards

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 one hundred and one 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 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 six of the cover paper and through the Quality Framework routine monitoring procedures.

### Good Practice

7. Of the 101 external examiner reports received by the University, 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 here:

## Feedback

8. Across all schools and faculties external examiners remarked on the good quality feedback given to students. Many reports highlighted both the consistency and depth of feedback as good practice. Some reports also commended the timely manner in which feedback was given.

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 quality of feedback is excellent, and the practice of giving feedback within a day demonstrates a high level of commitment on the part of the members of staff.*

*Feedback meticulously referring to learning outcomes and marking criteria*

*Very helpful, student focussed feedback and, 'feed-forward' on quite a few of the module assessment feedback sheets*

## Assessment

10. External examiners from across the University highlighted the range and variety of assessment as good practice.

11. Some examples from across the University of commendations for assessment are provided below:

*There are many innovative approaches to assessment in the programme...the use of podcasts is quite inspirational.*

*The range of assessment tasks provided gives students different ways to develop important skills and demonstrate their learning.*

*The careful blend of formative and summative assessment supports students' learning in the best possible way and takes the anxiety out of the assessment. This is to be highly commended.*

## Virtual learning environment

12. For the first time this year a number of external examiners commented positively on the availability and quality of Moodle resources. As a matter of course examiners from Health, Life and Social Sciences are enrolled on to Moodle. The option is also available for all other external examiners once they are enrolled on HRConnect. Anyone wishing to do this should contact Academic Quality.

13. Some examples from across the University of commendations for virtual learning environment are provided below:

*The Moodle site is clear and comprehensive*

*I was impressed by the use of the virtual learning environment*

*Module leader information on Moodle is of a high standard*

*I was given access to the Moodle sites for these courses, which were all informative and well maintained.*

### International Activity

14. The external examiners that had responsibility for provision undertaken at others campuses highlighted the work that had been done to ensure students studying at different campuses continued to receive an equal experience to on campus students.

15. Some examples from across the University of commendations for International activity are provided below:

*The introduction of strategically targeted support for Hong Kong modules has had a positive impact on the module marks.*

*The use of vidcasts, directed learning and then support tutorials is an ideal model for developing independent learning and the skills expected at these levels*

### Induction

16. The format for the external examiner induction event had previously been discussed as it had become challenging to enrol enough attendees for the event. Academic Quality decided to change both the timing of the event and some of the content. The revamped event attracted more attendees and the ones that attended were very positive about the event and commented on it within their report.

*I attended the external examiner Induction day on 28.04.14. I found that very useful.*

*I undertook the university wide external examiner induction during this year; my first in this role with Edinburgh Napier. This was helpful. At a local level I negotiated a more detailed induction and met a wide range of staff and this was incredibly helpful*

### Items for further consideration

17. 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 examiner are particular to the programme or modules examined and are therefore not discussed in this paper.

## Moderation

18. While 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.

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

*The process involved in double marking and internal moderation should be reviewed in order to ensure greater transparency and consistency. In some modules it has not always been clear that a robust internal moderation system has been employed.*

*Moderation should be more consistent, using the same form and preferably typing all comments. A clear line on changing or not changing individual marks in moderation should be maintained.*

*I would like to see a verification procedure to ensure the consistency of the implementation of the different QA rules, (moderation).*

## Information

20. Section B7 of the UK Quality code provides a pro forma of suggested materials for examiners. Several examiners from each faculty indicated that they had not received, or there had been some variability, in the materials sent to them. Academic Quality will undertake some research into this in 2014/15 with a view to producing a guidance note on minimum information to help to improve consistency and standardisation of information. Some examples of this are listed below:

*As in previous years there is some variability in the range of materials provided in the external examiners pack. I would suggest that more standardisation of the information is necessary.*

*It would be useful if more help and information could be made available to the external examiners prior to the exam boards.*

*Information about the programmes, their structure and assessment samples need to be made available to external examiners.*

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

## **Challenge**

21. This year some external examiners from each faculty commented on assessment and how further consideration should be given to ensuring that they are challenging and stretch the most capable students. Some examples of this are listed below:

*Continue finding additional ways to, 'stretch' the most capable 10% of students.*

*To give students more complex written tasks that show evidence of their research and independent study.*

*Some consideration should be given to introducing more challenging questions as a minor part of each question which requires students to apply concepts or methods.*

*At SCQF Level 11 it is insufficient to ask questions which simply test student ability to remember information and regurgitate. Questions should be asked which demand that the students critically evaluate; appraise; compare and contrast; justify with reasons; provide examples of; or demonstrate understanding of.*

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

22. Overall the reports received 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.
- b) 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.

**E Russell**  
**Academic Quality Advisor**

**12 September 2014**