

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee – 29 May 2009****Annual Report on External Examiners' Reports – Session 2007-08****Lesley Fielding/Catherine Omand, Senate Office****1. Introduction**

External Examiners are required to report to the Principal annually on a pro-forma provided by the Senate Office. The reports are reviewed by the Senate Office and are categorised according to our satisfaction: 1a (very satisfactory); 1b (satisfactory); 1c (satisfactory but some general comments made will prove helpful to course development) and 2 (concerns have been raised that require attention). There is one further category, "spcl", which accompanies the main categories if a specific issue has arisen that applies at University or Faculty level and generally lies outwith the Department's responsibility.

This report summarises the External Examiners' reports received for Session 2007-08, paying particular attention to concerns and/or recommendations that have been raised by External Examiners. The report also highlights exceptionally positive comments made by the External Examiners and identifies areas of good practice.

2. Statistical Information

The report covers External Examiner reports on courses taught in the University and does not include those reports on courses validated by the University or for joint courses where Glasgow is not the administering University (e.g. Christie's Education, Glasgow School of Art, the Scottish Agricultural College and Strathclyde University). These are reviewed by the relevant Joint Boards or Joint Liaison Committees.

The table at Annex 1 shows comparative figures for the last 6 years. 413 out of a total of 432 expected reports (96%) had been received by the date of the preparation of this report with 82 (20%) requiring a response from the Department.

Of the 413 reports received, 92 (23%) were categorised as 1a/1aspcl, 105 (25%) were categorised as 1b/bspcl and 129 (32%) were categorised as 1c/1cspcl. Consequently, (80%) expressed general satisfaction. This was a small improvement in comparison with figures for Session 2005-06 where 77% had expressed such satisfaction. It is pleasing to note that the number of reports categorised as 1a/1aspcl had increased from 19% and the number of 2/2spcl had decreased from 23%.

A copy of this report, together with Annex 1, will be sent to the External Examiners for information, following consideration by the Academic Standards Committee.

3. Comments Requiring Reply

As indicated in the table at Annex 1, 413 external examiner reports have been received. In accordance with University's procedures, the 82 (20%) reports which contained comment that required a response, the Head of Department was asked to arrange for the department to address the points made and to respond to the Senate

Office within 3 months¹. From the 82 requests, 76 replies have been received; copies of these responses have been sent to the External Examiner. There are currently 6 responses outstanding and Senate Office is currently chasing these.

4. Issues

Comments and recommendations from External Examiners for Session 2007-08 covered a wide range of issues. Actions arising from these issues are to be found in Section 7.

4.1 Marking and Marking Scheme

As in last year's report, marking has again given rise to substantial comment. Thirty-two External Examiners (8%) expressed various concerns over marking, 16 of which concerned inconsistency. Four External Examiners felt marking had been too lenient or generous whilst one found marking to be too harsh. Three External Examiners raised the issue of transparency as to how marks were awarded. Three External Examiners raised the question of anonymity and a further two suggested greater clarity of the marking criteria. Three External Examiners referred to a different marking scheme being used (2 from the same discipline). One External raised the concern of marks been wrongly calculated and one referred to inappropriate use of markers.

Twenty-seven reports were referred to the Code of Assessment Working Group regarding the Code of Assessment.

4.2 Assessment

Thirty-eight External Examiners raised issues relating to assessment. A significant number of these concerns related to examinations (12): overlap between essay and exam questions (4); too much choice (2), too limited choice (1); poor exam questions (1); same exam questions appearing (1); exam too short (1); exam not the most effective route to learning (1) and inappropriate exam structure (1). Two External Examiners questioned the lack of formal assessment. Other comments were very course/programme specific.

4.3 Procedural and Documentation

Thirty-six External Examiners raised concerns regarding procedures and documentation. Of these, 9 related to inadequate time to scrutinise papers and 14 related to insufficient information being provided. A variety of comments (12) were received concerning examination scripts; ranging from not receiving any (3) to receiving all rather than a sample (2), although two Externals commented that all examination scripts should be made available on the day of the Board of Examiners. Seven External Examiners commented on the variable commentary given either on, or accompanying, examination scripts, ranging from no commentary at all (2), limited or confusing information (4), overly extensive comments on materials (1). Two External Examiners proposed the introduction of a pro-forma to standardise comment sheets.

One External complained that the Department had not responded to comments made prior to the Examination and one did not receive outline model answers. One commented that it was unusual for a Board of Examiners to be held without External Examiners present.

Three External Examiners expressed concern that they had not been consulted regarding changes to the course. One External complained of the informality of the Board of Examiners.

¹ In Semester 2, the Clerk of Senate amended the response return to 8 weeks to ensure responses were received within the Session

4.4 Teaching and Course Content

Fifteen External Examiners raised issues related to Teaching and Course Content. These ranged from the programme being undemanding (5) to too challenging (1). Gaps in knowledge were identified where student performance was not consistent across areas (2), too few technical modules for a technical course (1) undergraduate courses being used as part to the taught postgraduate component of the course (1). Two External Examiners criticised that aims and course structure did not meet the needs of the students and that learning objectives could not be met. One External Examiner expressed concern regarding the departure of senior staff members and it was unclear how the department intended to develop its curriculum or its staffing.

4.5 Standard of Students

Six comments were received regarding the standard of students. Five External Examiners considered the standards to be unsatisfactory: one External felt that there was a significant lowering of standards with regard to distance learning modules, whilst another felt that the overall lack of knowledge of the poorest students was a cause for concern. One External Examiner was concerned regarding the high number of students dropping out.

5. Identification of Good Practice

It is very pleasing to report that 55 reports included comments that were considered exceptionally positive. Twenty-six External Examiners commented on the excellence of the staff, their dedication and the quality of teaching; 22 remarked on the outstanding work produced by the students, some of which commented that the work produced was better than elsewhere or the best work they had even seen; 20 commended the quality of the courses or programmes; 6 commented on exemplary procedures that were in place, particularly in relation to the examination process; 5 commended the University and its excellent reputation in the area examined and 4 stated that assessment offered an excellent range and outstanding diversity and depth.

Areas of good practice have been identified in Annex 3, some of which might be applied in other programmes/disciplines.

6. Remuneration of the External Examiner

There was a significant increase in complaints regarding remuneration, with one External Examiner resigning as a result of the fee offered. The Senate Office has since reviewed rates offered at other institutions and has concluded the fees paid by the University of Glasgow now tend to be lower than those paid elsewhere (see Annex 2). Faculties are currently being consulted on a proposal to adopt a new method to establish fees which will be simpler, transparent and equitable as compared to the current complicated system which is based on credits and/or students FTEs and which produces anomalies and inconsistencies. Ultimately, the proposal would mean additional costs for faculties, although these would be phased-in over four years. External Examiners contribute significantly to the University in maintaining academic standards and enhancing quality and there is concern that the remuneration currently given to External Examiners could damage the University's reputation.

7. Further Actions

The Academic Standards Committee is asked to note the following:

- **Senate Office to further discuss with the Code of Assessment Working Group issues concerning marking and the Code of Assessment, including**

discussions on examination and coursework overlap and re-use of examination papers

- **Senate Office to review the Note of Guidance: External Examiners for Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate Courses and to encourage Departments to comply with the guidelines**
- **Senate Office to identify good practice and consider possible options for implementation**
- **The time available for Departments to respond to External Examiner reports is reduced from 12 to 8 weeks in Semester 2**

| Diet | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Report Prepared | 10 March 2004 | 19 April 2005 | 12 May 2006 | 9 May 2007 | 6 May 2008 | 4 May 2009 |
| No. of external examiner reports expected | 429 | 411 | 425 | 404 | 422 | 432 |
| No. received at date of report | 395 (92%) | 390 (95%) | 388 (91%) | 374 (93%) | 382 (91%) | 413 (96%) |
| % received by 31 July ² | 51% | 55% | 50% | 49% | 43% | 46% |
| % received by 31 October ³ | 72% | 80% | 72% | 70% | 73% | 74% |
| Reports with substantial comment, for reply by Department | 83 19.3% | 74 (18%) | 114 (29%) | 56 (15%) | 87 (23%) | 82 (20%) |
| Replies received from Department and forwarded to external examiners to date | 71 (89%) | 59 (87%) | 94 (86%) | 41 (80%) | 56 (66%) | 77 (94%) |

² This is the date by which reports are requested

³ This is the date by which most reports on taught post graduate courses are expected

Findings and Comparisons

Details of fees have been obtained from a number of other universities and are as follows:

| University | Undergraduate | Postgraduate (Taught) | Postgraduate (research) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Aberdeen | Basic fee £225 plus capitation fee: Pre-honours non-professional £3 per FTE Pre-honours professional £6 per FTE Honours non-professional £6 per FTE Honours professional £3 per FTE | Basic fee £45 plus £15 per FTE Diploma/Certificate or £25 per FTE Masters | PhD £115 (£57.50 for resubmission) Masters £75 (£37.50 for resubmission) |
| Bristol | Basic fee of £70 plus £3.85 per FTE Minimum payment £110 Maximum payment £550 | Basic fee of £70 plus £25 per dissertation or £20 per candidate | Masters £120 PhD £150 Higher Doctorate £180 |
| Birmingham | No formula, but average fee £400-600 pa | | MPhil £40 Masters Degree £80 Doctorial Degree £105 Higher Doctorate £115 |
| Glasgow | No formula (based on historic information) Current lowest fee £110, highest £1,188 | 1-10 candidates £110 11-50 candidates £195 51-125 candidates £265 Over 125 £366 | PhD £133 MPhil £87 Higher Doctorate £166 |
| Edinburgh Example from College of Humanities | 0-160 credits £250 161-340 credits £550 >341 credits £800 | | |
| Exeter | Basic Annual fee of £348 plus additional fee per FTE nos. 1-150 students £ 174 151-300 students £ 348 301-600 students £ 697 601-900 students £1394 900 + students £2787 | | MPhil £102 PhD £125 Higher Doctorate £184 |
| Heriott Watt | Based on FTEs examined 1-5 £250 6-10 £300 11-20 £350 21-40 £400 41-60 £450 61-80 £500 81-100 £550 101-120 £600 Plus £50 for every additional 20 students or part thereof. | MBA/HWMP £300 per module per diet | |
| Nottingham | Basic Fee £200 per module plus £1.50 per FTE | Basic fee of £200 plus £5/£18 per FTE Diploma/ Masters | PhD £160 MPhil £130 Higher Doctorate £220 |
| Manchester | <25 students £325 26-75 student £375 >75 students £425 | Coursework/exams only <5 students £325 6-15 students £375 >15 students £425 For moderation of dissertations + £100 | All Doctorates £200 MPhil £100 Higher Doctorate £400 |
| St Andrews | No formula | £30 per student (120 credits) | PhD £110 MPhil £90 |
| Stirling | Basic fee of £200 plus £10 per non-advanced module plus £0.10 per student Basic fee of £200 plus £12.50 per advanced module plus £0.15 per student. | Basic fee of £40 plus £20 per student | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| Strathclyde (under review) | Basic fee of £130 plus a capitation fee of £2 per FTE | Basic fee of £90 plus a capitation fee of £12 per FTE | PhD - £120 MPhil - £90 |
| Surrey | | Doctorate basic fee £250 £100 per day attendance | |

| Department | Comment | Practice |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Adult and Continuing Education | <i>"Outstanding diversity and depth offered by the assessments for this course is exceptional: they could be used as models for other courses."</i> | Assessment |
| Archaeology | <i>"Dissertations demonstrated real research skills as well as enthusiasm. The Department is to be congratulated."</i> | Assessment |
| Classics | <i>"Also impressive was the detailed feedback provided by the Department on students' coursework, essays and dissertation. This gave each student a clear idea of what they had done well and where they could improve."</i> | Feedback |
| Crichton (Work Placement) | <i>"Feedback from employers indicates that these placements are not just trivial additions to their staffing, but actually enable them to achieve serious additional objectives. Such an interesting and innovatory module that colleagues in other institutions would benefit from it being written up for publication as an example of excellent practice."</i> <i>"Impressed by how user-friendly the course handbooks were. Refreshingly free of academic jargon and it was easy to see what was required of the students."</i> | Assessment Documentation |
| English Literature | <i>"The range of subjects I have read about over the last four years is extraordinary, but even more pleasing has been the range of approaches taken. Everyone involved in this programme, past and present, should be congratulated on their contribution to an outstanding degree."</i> | Teaching & Course Content |
| Geographical and Earth Sciences | <i>"Geology-style laboratory write-ups were an eye opener and I will suggest that these are introduced at my institution."</i> | Assessment |
| IBLS | <i>"Students embark on their PhDs very much better equipped for research than the average postgraduate student...I often direct some of our best students to the Glasgow course because I am so familiar with its quality."</i> | Course Content |
| Division of Immunology, Infection and Inflammation | <i>"I have taught immunology at the Universities of Bristol and Cambridge for 19 years and served as external examiner at Kings College, London and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge - therefore feel qualified to comment on the quality - believe the depth of enquiry and the overall standard of the immunology programme at Glasgow is unrivalled at other institutions. The University of Glasgow is to be commended for collecting an outstanding group of dedicated scientists and teachers in this department. Many of them are leaders in their own research specialty and the students are highly fortunate to be taught at this level."</i> | Course Content and Staff |
| School of Law | <i>"The procedures used by the Law School were equal to (if not better than) those used in other Scottish Institutions which offer similar o/sea option course."</i> | Procedural |

| | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| School of Modern Languages and Cultures: Section of Slavonic Studies | <p><i>"The attention of the staff to pastoral care and the welfare of students has been exceptional."</i></p> <p><i>"This remains well structured, highly organised and with an excellent range of assessment. The exam papers are very carefully designed."</i></p> <p><i>"The intellectual content, but also the innovative teaching methods used in a number of modules are outstanding."</i></p> | Staff Course Content Teaching |
| Management | <p><i>"It is a high quality programme that ranks amongst the best MBAs in the country."</i></p> | Course Content |
| Medicine | <p><i>"Administration of the examination - this is an outstanding feature of Glasgow. All staff I have dealt with treat assessment with the utmost care. The overwhelming impression is one of professionalism. All staff are committed to education and the students. Standards are high and students seem to be appreciative of the work of staff to enhance their experience. The leadership of Professors McKillop and Morrison is outstanding and sets the tone for the entire institution. I feel that I have learned very much more from being an external at Glasgow than I have contributed. To me your course stands out in the UK."</i></p> | Assessment and Staff |
| Division of Nursing and Health Care | <p><i>"The clinical portfolios which I scrutinised were amongst the best I have read during my time as an academic."</i></p> <p><i>"Students used a range of methodologies to carry out their research. This is to be commended."</i></p> | Students Course Content |
| Philosophy | <p><i>"Specially commend the comprehensive and wholly admirable guide to the examination process produced by the Department's Examination Officer. The Glasgow Department has historically been one of the largest and best regarded Philosophy Departments in the country."</i></p> | Procedural and Staff |
| Sociology | <p><i>"The standard of the dissertations that I saw were particularly high, indicating not only able students but also successful supervision. The Department is to be congratulated for having consistently provided this quality of provision."</i></p> | Students and Staff |