

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee – 22 November 2010****Quality Update****Wendy Muir and Dr Jack Aitken, Senate Office**

This paper provides an update on recent developments and activities relating to quality matters in relation to:

- The QAA Academic Infrastructure
- The Universities UK review of the external examiner system
- The University's ELIR Report
- The appointment and induction of College and School Quality Officers
- Review of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework

1. Review of the Academic Infrastructure

The QAA has published a report the evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure (AI) (comprising the QAA *Code of practice; Framework for HE qualifications, Subject benchmark statements and Programme specification*) and is available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/evaluation10findings/

The evaluation is largely positive and found that the AI allows for consistency of approaches and common languages for quality, but with sufficient flexibility to suit the diversity of the sector and recognise institutional autonomy. There was, however, no real appetite for radical change but the report does contain proposals for the future direction of the academic infrastructure, viz:

- QAA should state clearly what “academic threshold standards” and “academic quality” mean.
- QAA should set out which parts of the academic infrastructure are essential requirements for setting and maintaining academic standards.
- QAA should clarify the essential requirements for managing the quality of learning opportunities.
- QAA should set out how the components of a revised academic infrastructure relate to other relevant reference points used by HEIs.
- QAA should continue to ensure that the reference points for setting, maintaining, assuring and enhancing academic quality and academic standards remain robust, flexible and up-to-date.
- QAA should raise public awareness of the framework for academic standards and academic quality in UK HE.

A sector-wide consultation is expected in late November/December and an event is planned in Glasgow on Tuesday 11 January 2011. Details of this event will be circulated in due course.


It is likely that any changes to the Academic Infrastructure will be in place by the end of Session 2010-11, but will not become binding on institutions until the beginning of Session 2012-13.

2. Universities UK Review of the External Examiner System

Universities UK and GuildHE, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and other organisations are conducting a review of external examining arrangements in the UK.

The review is being conducted in response to a recommendation from HEFCE arising from the HEFCE Teaching Quality and Student Experience (TQSE) sub-committee report on HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality assurance (HEFCE 2009/40) and as part of a wider commitment to ensure that quality arrangements are continually reviewed and developed.

The chair of the review is Dame Janet Finch, Vice-Chancellor of Keele University and the review is supported by a Review Group and an Expert Group (drawing upon a wide range of experts from the sector across the UK).

A discussion paper was issued to seek views and assist in the development of the recommendations  [Review of External Examining Arrangements in the UK Discussion Paper 22 July 2010](#). The University submitted a response in late September 2010, which is set out in the Appendix

The comments submitted by Universities, Colleges of Higher Education, students bodies, et are being considered currently and the review will make recommendations in December 2010.

3. ELIR Report and Action Plan

The University's report for the most recent ELIR visit was published in April 2010 and an Action Plan has been developed to progress the areas identified a requiring attention. One year after publication of the ELIR report (ie April 2011), the University has to submit to the QAA a year-on response to ELIR. This is to focus on 'the action taken following the review and include consideration of the effectiveness of that action insofar as it is reasonable for the institution to take such a view in the time that has elapsed.'

The year-on response will be a focus for the annual ELIR discussion held with the QAA closest to the anniversary of the publication of the ELIR report. Following the annual discussion, the QAA will write to the University to confirm whether the action we have taken is broadly in line with the outcomes of the ELIR report. QAA Scotland is also required to report to SFC on the extent to which University is responding appropriately to the outcomes contained within the ELIR reports.

The year-on responses to ELIR will form a key information source for these regular reports. The final version will be published on the QAA website alongside the ELIR report to which the response refers.

An Action Plan stemming from the ELIR has been produced. This was considered and endorsed at the Learning & Teaching Committee Away-Day session in September. The individual actions are presently being compiled into a number of 'projects', each of which will be overseen by an appointed member of staff. One of these is Quality Processes. The actions associated with this project were the subject

of the paper that went to the meeting of ASC in October, which noted and made decisions concerning the work that involved the Committee. The Action Plan will help with the compilation of the University's year-on response to QAA.

The QAA has also just published printed versions of the Summary Report from the 2009 ELIR. The full reports are no longer issued in hard copy, but are published only on the QAA web site.

4. Appointment and Induction of College and School Quality Officers

Good progress has been made with the appointment of College and School Quality Officers although some appointments are outstanding at the College and School level (for the latter, mainly in the College of Science and Engineering).

An induction event was held on 17 November 2010 for around a dozen Quality Officers. This included sessions on the Scottish and the University's Quality Frameworks, including the role of ASC. The SRC covered the role of students in quality management. The event was well received and another workshop will be held on annual monitoring in due course as Quality Officers will have a significant role in the revised process.

5. Review of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)

The mid-point has now been reached in the second ELIR cycle. In preparation for the next cycle, the QAA is initiating a review of the QEF, of which ELIR forms one of five parts. (The others are: internally-led subject review and monitoring; the national Enhancement Themes; the engagement of students in quality management; and the public information produced by HEIs.) The review is scheduled to commence before Christmas and to produce recommendations for final approval by the Scottish Funding Council by September 2011. It is not expected that the review will lead to significant changes to processes.

The University of Glasgow's response to QAA / UniversitiesUK Review of External Examining Arrangements in the UK

The following are the main issues arising from the review. Below are some of our initial thoughts

- Principles to inform the strengthening of external examining arrangements that recognise both the strengths of current arrangements and the importance of clear and consistent arrangements that are effectively communicated - AGREE
- A structure for the minimum expectations for the role of external examiners that outlines the judgements all external examiners should make and the advice that they should provide - AGREE
- Developing national criteria for the appointment of external examiners that build upon existing institutional practice to provide enhanced transparency and confidence – AGREE, BUT WOULD NEED TO ALLOW FOR EXCEPTIONS TO SUCH RULES, E.G. THE REQUIRED PERIOD FOR RE APPOINTMENT. THIS WOULD ADDRESS SPECIALIST SUBJECTS AS WELL AS REGIONAL REQUIREMENTS, FOR INSTANCE, IN SCOTLAND, SOME SUBJECT AREAS OFTEN HAVE SMALLER POOLS, SUCH AS LAW
- Ensuring improved transparency about the appointment processes for external examiners - AGREE
- All institutions providing induction and training, possibly drawing upon a common core programme - NO, FOR AN INSTITUTION THE SIZE OF GLASGOW (WE HAVE OVER 400 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS) THIS WOULD BE IMPRACTICAL AND COSTLY. IF ALL INSTITUTIONS WERE TO ADOPT THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS, ALL INSTITUTIONS WOULD SURELY BE AWARE OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER ROLE. SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE, ON LINE AND VIA THE DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL.
- All institutions demonstrating the importance of external examining in terms of recognition and support for their own staff who act as external examiners for other institutions - CURRENTLY NOT FORMALLY RECOGNISED.
- A national template for reports so that students and wider stakeholders can be assured that all external examiners address certain key issues in every institution, including a section aimed specifically at students - AGREE ON HAVING A CORE TEMPLATE IN ORDER FOR COMPARISON BUT UNSURE OF SECTION AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT STUDENTS? THE AUDIENCE FOR THE REPORT IS THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY. COULD SUCH A SECTION CHANGE THE WAY AN EXTERNAL COMMENTED? WOULD THIS NOT INVOLVE SOME LEVEL OF DUPLICATION? STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES COULD HAVE ACCESS TO REPORTS AT SSLC MEETINGS.
- Clear processes for external examiners to raise concerns about assessment or the operation of external examining, including the adoption of the QAA Causes for Concern process when an external examiner is not satisfied with the response from the institution - AGREE. HOWEVER, ALSO SHOULD HAVE IN PLACE MECHANISM FOR DEALING WITH EXTERNAL EXAMINERS WHO DO NOT ADEQUATELY FULFIL THEIR ROLE.

Below, are the University of Glasgow's responses' to the questions specified:

Section 1: Principles to Inform the Development of External Examiner Arrangements

Question 1: Are these principles acceptable and are there other principles that should be considered?

Principle 1: In the UK system each institution has responsibility for setting the standards of its awards within the context of common guidelines, and subject to audit/review by an independent agency. This should continue to be supported and strengthened. External examining is only one part, albeit a very important part, of this system.

Principle 2: Institutional Audit/Review is an important mechanism for testing whether external examining is working in practice and external examining arrangements should remain one of the key areas for Institutional Audit/Review and a critical system in determining the outcome of Institutional Audit/Review.

Principle 3: More should be done to articulate, explain and promote the role of the external examiner. More nationally consistent, developed and supported external examining expectations would improve the effectiveness, transparency and credibility of the system, especially with external audiences.

CONSIDER THESE PRINCIPLES ACCEPTABLE

Section 2: Role

Question 2: Are these initial ideas and the distinction between judgement and advice a helpful starting point for developing minimum expectations? Where might these initial ideas be clarified or developed to ensure that it is relevant to all institutional practices?

- IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO HAVE A CLEAR INDICATION OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUDGEMENT AND ADVICE. MORE SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON WHEN AN INSTITUTION **MUST ACCEPT** AN EXTERNAL'S DECISION OR WHERE THERE IS POSSIBILITY OF CHOICE

Section 3: Selection of External Examiners

Question 3: In order to increase transparency and public confidence there should be clear expectations about the selection processes in institutions and the processes should be publicly accessible, do you agree?

AGREE

Question 4: There should be a national set of generic criteria established for the appointment of external examiners, do you agree? What should be included in the criteria?

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE, BUT THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE SOME LOCAL FLEXIBILITY.

OUR CURRENT CRITERIA HAS PROVEN SUCCESSFUL AND INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

Has the proposed Examiner been a member of academic staff in a higher education institution and undertaken a normal range of teaching and examining duties for the last seven years?

Please describe below the experience (including the length of that experience) which qualifies the nominee as an External Examiner for the programme/course(s).

Has the nominee been an External Examiner for any undergraduate or taught postgraduate programme / course in the University of Glasgow at any time during the four years prior to the date of appointment indicated in 6 above?

Has the nominee been a member of staff of the University of Glasgow within the five years prior to the date of appointment indicated in 6 above?

At the proposed date of appointment, will the nominee hold an External Examinership for undergraduate or taught postgraduate degrees in more than one other institution?

At the date of appointment will any member of staff of the nominating school(s) be an examiner for an undergraduate or taught postgraduate programme / course in the nominee's department?

Section 4: Induction and Training

Question 5: Should all institutions provide induction for external examiners who are new to the institution, and training and development for first time external examiners? Should a common core programme and template for induction and training be developed?

NO, AS FOR AN INSTITUTION THE SIZE OF GLASGOW, THIS WOULD BE IMPRACTICAL AND COSTLY. COMMON CORE PROGRAMME PLUS SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE TO NEW EXTERNAL EXAMINERS, ON LINE AND VIA THE DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL. FIRST TIME EXTERNAL EXAMINERS ARE MENTORED. WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF ACTUALLY VISITING THE INSTITUTION WHICH ALSO HAS TIME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EXTERNAL? WHAT IS THE TAKE UP RATE OF EXTERNALS AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS? WOULD SUCH A PROGRAMME BE COMPULSORY? IF SO, THIS MAY PUT STAFF OFF THE ROLE.

Section 5: Recognition

Question 6: The importance of this role should be recognised by all Universities and institutions with degree awarding powers in promotion procedures, including clear and demonstrable recognition of the value to the institution, the subject and the sector, do you agree? How else should it be recognised?

AGREE, CURRENTLY NOT FORMALLY RECOGNISED AT GLASGOW BUT CONSIDERED PART OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Section 6: Reporting

Question 7: Should there be a national template for external examiners reports?

WOULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE A COMMON CORE ELEMENT FOR COMPARABILITY

Question 8: Should there be a specific section written for students and should this be made available to all students within the institution, and made available to any external party on request?

AGREE THAT IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO PUBLISH WHOLE REPORTS AS THIS COULD AFFECT WHAT EXTERNAL EXAMINER COMMENT ON. IN ADDITION, IT WOULD BE VERY TIME CONSUMING UPLOADING 400 PLUS REPORTS FOR A SMALL MINORITY. HOWEVER, WOULD A SPECIFIC SECTION WRITTEN FOR STUDENTS NOT SIMPLY DUPLICATE WHAT THE EXTERNAL HAS ALREADY COMMENTED ON UNDER QUALITY AND PROVISION OF ASSESSMENT AND STANDARD OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT? COULD THIS CHANGE HOW AND WHAT THE EXTERNAL COMMENTS ON?

Question 9: Should all reports and all analysis of reports be shared with student representatives?

PREFERENCE FOR REPORTS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE TO STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES VIA STUDENT/STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEES. AN ANNUAL REPORT THAT SUMMARIES ISSUES RAISED BY EXTERNAL EXAMINERS COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE ON-LINE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Question 10: Should all institutions publish names of all external examiners, their job titles and institutions? What would be the most effective way of ensuring that this information is easily accessible?

DISAGREE – HOW WOULD THIS ENHANCE THE PROCESS? IT WOULD ENCOURAGE STUDENTS WITH GRIEVANCES TO CONTACT EXTERNALS DIRECTLY EVEN IF ADVISED NOT TO. THE SYSTEM MUST REMAIN OBJECTIVE AND IMPARTIAL. PROVISION OF TOTAL NUMBER OF EXTERNALS, LISTING INSTITUTIONS WOULD BE SUFFICIENT.

Section 7: Raising Concerns

Question 11: Institutions should have in place transparent internal procedures for considering and dealing with robust discussion of issues and concerns which include the possibility of making a report direct to the head of the institution? Do you agree and what else might these procedures include?

AGREE, HAVE THIS IN PLACE. WE ALSO OFFER THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER THE OPPORTUNITY TO INCLUDE A CONFIDENTIAL REPORT, IF SO WISHED.

Question 12: Should there be a clear and independent mechanism for external examiners to use once they have exhausted internal procedures? Does the QAA Causes for Concern procedure represent an appropriate mechanism?

AGREE, WE CURRENTLY DO NOT HIGHLIGHT THE QAA CAUSES FOR CONCERN PROCEDURE BUT CAN INCORORATE THIS INTO CURRENT PROCEDURES. THIS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IN HIGHLIGHTING TO STAFF THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING CONCERNS RAISED QUICKLY AND REASSURES THE PUBLIC ON THE OBJECTIVE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER.

Any other comments

PROPOSE THAT PROCEDURES ARE ALSO CONSIDERED FOR DEALING WITH EXTERNAL EXAMINERS WHO DO NOT ADEQUATELY FULFIL THEIR ROLE.