University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 25 May 2012

Annual Report on External Examiners' Reports – Session 2010-11

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1. Introduction

External examiners are required to report to the Principal annually on a pro-forma provided by the Senate Office. This is now done on-line due to the Senate Office move to a web-based external examiner database in April 2011. The reports are reviewed by the Senate Office and are categorised according to our satisfaction. The previous categories (1a, 1b, 1c and 2) have been replaced by the following: A (very satisfactory); B (satisfactory); C (satisfactory but some general comments made will prove helpful to course development) and D (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 College level and generally lies outwith the School's responsibility.

This report summarises the External examiners' reports received for Session 2010-11, paying particular attention to concerns and/or recommendations that have been raised by External Examiners. The report draws attention to issues that have affected External Examining procedures during Session 2010.

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 six years. 403 out of a total of **479** expected reports (84%) had been received by the date of the preparation of this report with 38 (8%) requiring a response from the School. Of the 403 reports received, 156 (39%) were categorised as A/Aspcl, 114 (28%) were categorised as B/Bspcl and 95 (23%) were categorised as C/Cspcl. Consequently, 365 (90%) expressed general satisfaction.

3. Comments Requiring Reply

As indicated in the table at Annex 1, from the 38 reports (9%) which contained comments that required a response, the Head of School was asked to arrange for the School or Subject to address the points made and to respond to the Senate Office within 3 months. From the 38 requests, 9 replies have been received; copies of these responses have been sent to the External Examiners. Senate Office is currently following up on outstanding responses.

4. Issues

In general, comments and recommendations made by External Examiners for Session 2010-11 covered the following issues.

4.1 Marking and Marking Scheme

There has been a slight decline in number of comments pertaining to marking and use of the marking scheme. Four external examiners commented on specific instances of overmarking and inconsistencies in marking. Other comments made addressed the absence of double marking and the marking schedule not being fully utilised.

4.2 Assessment

Twenty-two External Examiners raised issues relating to assessment (as compared to 18 raised last year). Six external examiners commented that the weighting assigned to dissertations was inappropriate whilst six external examiners commented negatively on the possible removal of vivas. Other concerns included: question spotting, overlap between questions set for essays and examinations and criticism of the short answer question mode.

4.3 Procedural and Documentation

A total of 17 comments were raised regarding inadequate procedures and documentation. Three external examiners commented that they had not been invited to attend the Board of Examiners meeting and one external examiner commented that the Board of Examiners meeting was disorganised. Three external examiners criticised the practice of using non-academic invigilators. Two External Examiners commented on the lack of communication by the School. Other comments addressed the globalisation of exam boards and variable feedback.

4.4 Teaching and Course Content

Three external examiners raised issues relating to teaching and course content. Concerns expressed included the possible dilution of a course through removal of a key science, the need to revise the level of a course, and the removal of specialisms within a course.

4.5 Standard of Students

One external examiner raised concern regarding the standard of students (four last year). The external examiner was concerned at the level of understanding/achievement of the students observing low mean averages.

4.6 Staffing

Nineteen external examiners raised concerns regarding the level of staffing and the inability of programmes to sustain adequate levels of teaching if student numbers continued to increase without investment.

5. Code of Assessment

The Code of Assessment continued to evoke comments from external examiners. There were seventeen comments specific to the Code of Assessment. Four external examiners commented on the need for clarity with regard to the conversion of overseas marks. Comments in relation to the discretionary band included the need for policing of the criteria being used to judge such cases, the need for a narrower discretionary range and the zone of discretion discouraging the full use of the marking scale. Four external examiners considered that the Code of Assessment had no logical basis, whilst two external examiners expressed their satisfaction with the Code of Assessment.

6. Identification of Good Practice

The revised on-line external examiner report form includes a section identifying examples of Good Practice. Most external examiners have provided examples of Good Practice and it is planned that these responses will be reviewed during the coming months by the Senate Office. Subsequently, examples of Good Practice from Periodic Subject Review, Annual Monitoring and External Examiners will be collated and forwarded to the Learning & Teaching Centre for inclusion on a Good Practice website.

7. New on-line External Examiner System

Further to last year's report, IT Services has undertaken the modernisation of the External Examiner's database. A new web system has been developed and has introduced the submissions of on-line examiner reports. The submitted responses are then translated into PDF format, emailed to schools and saved in the University's document management system (EDRMS). The system allows further use of automated system within the Senate Office which currently includes:

- Nomination request/reminder
- School Reminder for response to EE report
- Acknowledgement of receipt of report/forwarding of report to School
- Request Examiners report/reminder
- School Report Notification

It is anticipated that the new system will ultimately permit submission of all paperwork such as nominations, School responses, etc, electronically thereby creating a faster and more efficient process. In addition, examiner information, including reports, will be made available to Schools for courses and programmes within the PIP system. The reports will also be published automatically to the Senate Office website.

It is planned that an on-line induction programme will be introduced via the report submission web form, giving access to related University, College and School information as well as external examiner related business.

The new database is being launched in phases: Phase One was launched in April 2011 and saw the implementation of the on-line report system. Subsequent releases have addressed any technical difficulties that had occurred with the initial release and also introduced administrative options including School response notification emails, notification emails for external examiner nominations and external examiner report reminders. Later in 2012, Phase Two will focus on making the reports which have now been submitted available to the University community. External Examiner information will be made available to Schools and reports published to the web. Induction information will also be added to the Examiners'' web form.

In early 2013 automation of school-related processes such as nominations and responses to examiners will be added.

To date, the system has provided benefits including:

- Introduction of a quick and user-friendly form for examiners which allows validation of the responses so increasing the quality of the reports.
- Improved efficiency of forwarding external examiner documents to the Schools

- A managed repository of examiners report documentation in the EDRMS which will build up over time and can be automatically published.

As the system is adapted at each upgrade this should improve further. There have been some minor difficulties, most notably with the GUID registration process. Six external examiners criticised the registration process in their annual report. However, most problems have been addressed by IT Services and it is hoped that the registration process will be simplified in line with the University's Payroll system.

8. QAA Quality Code Chapter B7: External Examining - Update

Further to the report presented at ASC in February 2012, the Senate Office has undertaken the following actions:

- External Examiners have been notified via the annual report form that their reports would be made available to students and therefore names of individual staff and students should not be included (indicator 13).

- The letter of appointment has been amended to advise External Examiners of their right to invoke the QAA's concerns scheme, or to inform the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body if they had a serious concern relating to systematic failings in academic standards (indicator 18).

Future Actions:

- With the development of the On-line system it is planned that the external examiner reports would be placed on the web.

- On-line general induction sessions on University policy for external once the on-line system was fully operational. (indicator 6).

9. Summary

The Academic Standards Committee is asked **to note** the following:

- The summary of comments made by external examiners in their reports for session 2010-11. These comments will be addressed where necessary by schools and responses reviewed and monitored by the Senate Office.

- The external examiner on-line system update

- Revised procedures for the identification of Good Practice

- The QAA Quality Code Chapter 7: External Examining update

Diet	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Report Prepared	9 May 2007	6 May 2008	4 May 2009	7 May 2010	13 May 2011	14 May 2012
No. of external examiner reports expected	404	422	432	441	449	479
No. received at date of report	374 (93%)	382 (91%)	413 (96%)	409 (93%)	404 (90%)	403 (84%)
% received by 31 July [1]	49%	43%	46%	50%	44%	37%
% received by 31 October [2]	70%	73%	74%	78%	70%	60%
Reports with substantial comment, for reply by Department	56 (15%)	87 (23%)	82 (20%)	52 (12%)	51 (13%)	38 (9%)
Replies received from Department and forwarded to external examiners to date	41 (80%)	56 (66%)	77 (94%)	38 (73%)	36 (71%)	9 (24%)

[1] This is the date by which reports are requested

[2] This is the date by which most reports on taught post graduate courses are expected