

Title	Postgraduate External Examiner Reports overview analysis for 2014/15
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Type	Report
Date	March 2016
Strategic context	Confirmation of academic standards of Postgraduate awards
Summary	Schools considered School-level issues as part of the Annual Course Review which took place in December 2015. UTLC to consider a summary of matters arising from 2014/15 postgraduate external examiner reports.
Essential reading	None
Risk analysis	Low risk
Resource implications	None
Consultation	Not applicable
Future actions	To be determined by UTLC
Effective date of introduction	n/a
Recommendation	To consider a summary of matters arising from 2014/15 postgraduate external examiners reports.

1. Summary and Analysis of Postgraduate External Examiners Reports 2014/15

Overall most expected reports were received by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office and distributed widely throughout the institution in line with agreed procedures (76/85 received giving a 88% response rate compared to a 93% response rate in 2013/14). This excludes BSMS reports which JARB receives on behalf of the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton.

Actions plans in response to School level issues will be considered by the School TLCs and responses sent directly by the Chair of the Progression and Award Board (PAB) to External Examiners. The reports and the action plans will be reviewed during the Annual Course Review event which will take place on 9th December 2015. A proposed response to institutional issues that have been raised in External Examiner Reports have been set out below.

Outstanding External Examiner Reports 2014/15 (*Note that the BMEc deadline was later than other Schools. UTLC will receive a final summary*):

MSc Financial Risk and Investment Analysis; MSc International Management; MSc Management and Finance; MSc Managing Innovation and Projects; MSc Global Supply Chain and Logistics Management; MSc International Finance; MSc Climate Change & Policy; MSc Climate Change & Development; PGDip Psychological Therapy

Sections 2-4 provide a summary of data extracted from the External Examiner reports 2014/15 and areas of good practice amongst Schools.

Institutional issues (refer to relevant section for more detail)

- To maximise use of electronic means for detecting academic misconduct – *see response below*

Update on Institutional issues from 2013/14

- Improve communication and workload planning for External Examiners (better communication regarding moderation timescales, consistent and clear evidence of a distinct marking and moderation, provision of statistical data as part of the moderation process, opportunities to meet students) - *future roll out of E-Submission will enable external moderation at an earlier stage and will ensure evidence of separate marking and moderation processes are provided, along with statistical data. FAQs have been provided to External Examiners to help address some of the issues being raised.*
- To consider how best to use External Examiners – *University will provide an induction session for new and continuing External Examiners to build including discipline specific opportunities to meet with students and Faculty.*

- Organisation of the PAB (consideration of borderline strategy and use of condoned credit) – *Some Schools consulted with board members in advance of the PAB to agree strategies for borderline and condoned credit application to reduce discussion regarding the regulations at the PAB. One School ran a pilot and held their PAB in two sittings with a core membership attending both.*
- To maximise use of electronic means for detecting academic misconduct – *University is currently rolling out the ESEF project for level 5 assessments in 2015/16. This means that level 5 assessments will go through Turnitin.*

2.1 Summary of Social Science Schools External Examiner Reports

Area explored	BMEc	Global Studies ¹	ESW ²	LPS (excluding CPE)	General comments if area not fully agreed by EE
standards: appropriate	11/11	13/13	12/12	8/8	
marking criteria: appropriate/consistent	10/11	13/13	12/12	8/8	BMEc (MSc International Accounting and Corporate Governance): Modules 743N1, 895N1 and 744N1 I was not provided with suggested solutions for the resit papers when sent the papers for approval.
performance: comparable	10/11	13/13	12/12	8/8	BMEc (MSc Technology and Innovation Management): There could be better balance of modules across the teaching period, from the perspective of workload for students.
learning outcomes: positive comments	11/11	10/13	12/12	8/8	Global/IDS (MA Migration Studies): Difficult to comment, I have not always had access to learning outcomes for the modules I examined. Global/IDS (MA Environment, Policy and Development; MA Social Development): While the dissertation process offers formative feedback. I was surprised to note there was no form of formative assessment/feedback for the other term papers/essays. Global/IDS (MA Gender and Development): A discussion of the assessment procedures for Doing Gender, to ensure that they rigorously measure outcomes.
marks awarded: appropriate	11/11	13/13	10/12	8/8	ESW (PGCE): Comments on scripts did not always square with the grade given at the end. ESW (MA Education; MEd): A few marks awarded to the literature reviews were under-generous and there were inconsistencies in second marking and moderation practices.
processes: sound, appropriate and fairly conducted	11/11	13/13	12/12	8/8	BMEc: PGT PAB are still dominated by the complex rules and interpretations of the regulations. BMEc: More clarity with respect of the rules needed.
teaching, learning and assessment: positive comments	11/11	13/13	12/12	8/8	

¹ Including IDS

² Including PGCE

T&L methods and opportunities: positive comments	11/11	12/13	12/12	8/8	Global/IDS (MA Globalisation and Development): As I have not observed teaching in IDS, I have no basis on which to comment on these issues.
materials: sufficient	11/11	12/13	10/12	8/8	<p>ESW: Following my criticism of the 'viva' for PKfS I have been invited to attend some of these next year.</p> <p>ESW (MA International Education and Development): Late receipt of moderation sample arrived too late for me to analyse and for my comments to feature in my Report to the Programme Team.</p> <p>Global/IDS (MA Gender and Development): I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with students.</p>

2.2 General comments made by External Examiners which relates to individual Schools

BMEc: Students are being awarded a merit/distinction as a result of condonement despite module failure.

BMEc: Dissertations need to be processed through a package that identifies plagiarism and staff need to be trained up on the package with students being made aware of it.

BMEc (MSc Innovation and Sustainability for International Development): I think there are problems with the implementation of the marking criteria. I have found that the final marks and the comments are not always coherent with the marking criteria.

BMEc (MBA Business Administration): Need to better map the assessment against the module learning outcomes to show which assessment tests which outcome.

ESW: Module on Social Adversity, Risk and Resilience I felt that the module learning outcomes were long and elaborate and difficult to grasp.

ESW: Ensure all portfolios are fully anonymised so that no student social worker names appear.

Global/IDS (MA Gender and Development): Convenors could ensure that markers better use the full range of marks, especially at the higher end.

Global/IDS (MA Environment, Policy and Development; MA Social Development): The main form of assessment here remains the term paper, essay or dissertation, there could be other mechanisms for testing learning or understanding, for instance, through presentations, brief papers etc.

Global/IDS (MA Migration Studies): Learning outcomes should be published in all unit guides and directly consulted when setting essay titles with students.

Global/IDS: Procedures for checking for plagiarism should be more robust.

LPS (MA Gender Studies): More detailed advice to students on the comments sheet about which aspects of the work need improvement, rather than more general comments, such as 'there are a few errors'.

LPS (MA Gender Studies): The scripts I saw were not annotated. In a couple of cases, comments from the two markers seemed slightly contradictory. I have suggested to the teaching team that they review their process for ensuring comments are coherent and useful for students.

2.3 Areas of good practice arising from External Examiner reports directed to individual Social Science Schools

Area	Summary of content
Assessment and marks	<p>BMEc (<i>MSc International Marketing</i>): Scripts have been diligently marked, and there is clear evidence of the internal moderation process having been followed.</p> <p>ESW: I was impressed by the standard of marking and moderation achieved in this programme.</p> <p>Global/IDS (<i>MA Global Political Economy; MA International Relations</i>): The dissertation plan and feedback practices seem exemplary.</p> <p>Global/IDS: Templates used by staff on this programme encourage careful marking and comments, and sensitive double marking.</p> <p>LPS: I was particularly impressed with the level of feedback provided to students.</p> <p>LPS: I have seen annotated scripts, detailed feedback and marks in line with comments.</p>
Processes	<p>BMEc: It was a positive move to split the exam board into a morning and afternoon session. This was definitely a great improvement. I also applaud the use of iPad's to present the information. This is the first university that I have seen doing this and it was very successful.</p> <p>ESW: All processes for assessment, examination and determination of awards have been conducted fairly and appropriately.</p> <p>Global/IDS: The department is working very well in this area.</p>
Teaching, learning and assessment	<p>BMEc (<i>MSc Science and Technology Policy</i>): The feedback form for dissertations was very clear – there was a good balance of general comments which would be helpful for improving future assessments, and specific comments that demonstrated markers had engaged with the substance of the assessments.</p> <p>ESW: The variety of modes of assessment are appropriate for individual modules and give a good balance of ways in which students can demonstrate their learning.</p> <p>ESW: There was clear evidence of good practice within the internal marker feedback provided to students in relation to their assignments.</p> <p>ESW: Students are given sound guidance and clear information.</p>

	<p>Global/IDS: The course stands out for its innovative pedagogy and cutting edge, contemporary readings.</p> <p>Global/IDS: High quality student work.</p> <p>LPS: Feedback provided on scripts was very thorough as well as very helpful comments explaining the mark and giving information about how it can be improved.</p> <p>LPS: The consistent use of feedback forms that enable EE's to get a clear idea of the ways in which assessment criteria are being applied is a model of good practice.</p>
T&L methods and opportunities	<p>BMEc (<i>MSc Management and Entrepreneurship</i>): Good balance between lectures, workshops and individual student learning. Reading lists are up to date and there are plenty of online library facilities for students to utilise.</p> <p>BMEc (<i>MBA Business Administration</i>): There are opportunities for group work, peer reflection, and synthesis around real world projects/companies.</p> <p>ESW (<i>MA Social Work</i>): The range of learning methods reflects the generic expectations of the College of Social Work.</p> <p>ESW (<i>PGCE</i>): All teaching and learning methods and learning opportunities are carefully selected and designed to comply with very best practice and to model that practice to the students.</p> <p>Global/IDS: The methods and opportunities provided appear opposite to the specified learning outcomes.</p> <p>Global/IDS: Mix of academic and theoretical study, personal reflection and professional field work all contribute to making this a unique and highly valued course.</p> <p>LPS: The MA Gender Studies course gives students a variety of topics to choose from and provides them with good opportunities. Students are encouraged to engage with topical issues with the benefit of contemporary academic theory and research.</p>

3.1 Summary of Science Schools External Examiner Reports

Area explored	EngInfo	Life Sciences	MPS ³	Psychology	General comments if area not fully agreed by EE
standards: appropriate	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	
marking criteria: appropriate/consistent	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	EngInfo: In the majority of cases the marking criteria are comprehensive and clearly documented. However in a small number of examination questions the breakdown of marks is inadequate with the result that it is very difficult for students to estimate the effort associated with the various components of the question.
performance: comparable	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	
learning outcomes: positive comments	4/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	EngInfo: Department to review modules where there is a variation in student achievement across modules, to check that the difficulty of the assessments are appropriate. EngInfo: It would be better to have a clearer mapping between questions and learning outcomes.
marks awarded: appropriate	5/6	2/2	1/2	5/5	EngInfo: For some of the modules I did find it difficult to know how marks were awarded. There is not a clear audit trail for EE's to inspect. MPS: Some exams where evidence for second marking was either incomplete or missing altogether.
processes: sound, appropriate and fairly conducted	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	
teaching, learning and assessment: positive comments	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	
T&L methods and opportunities: positive comments	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	
Materials: sufficient	6/6	2/2	2/2	5/5	EngInfo: I should receive responses to my comments on exam papers and have access to samples of the marking in a more timely manner.

³ External Examiners for MPS cover both UG and PG courses, therefore in some instances a combined report was written.

3.2 General comments made by External Examiners which relates to individual Schools

EngInfo (MSc Mechanical Engineering; MSc Advanced Mechanical Engineering): Significant amount of variability in the difficulty of assessments and this is borne out by the variation in student achievement across modules. A careful review of these modules for which the average marks are very high or very low to check that the difficulty of the assessment is appropriate.

EngInfo (MSc Mechanical Engineering; MSc Advanced Mechanical Engineering): The marking of MSc group marks should be reviewed, particularly in relation to the assessment of the individual contributions to the group projects.

EngInfo: Consider whether the input from EE's might be more valuable at the MAB rather than the PAB. In my view it would make more sense for me to contribute my input at the MAB because this is the point at which assessments are reviewed and scrutinised. If this is not possible, it would be useful to have a summary of these meetings.

EngInfo: It would be very useful to have the opportunity to meet some of the current students and to review some of the assessment samples earlier in the session.

EngInfo: Explore ways to reduce burden of printed paper required for the functioning of the PAB.

EngInfo: Cohort data would be useful as it was difficult to get a feel for overall cohort performance across modules.

Life Science (MSc Genetic Manipulation and Molecular Cell Biology): Review marking criteria for Topics in Genetic Manipulation and Molecular Cell Biology, specifically for the shorter questions. Some review of the learning outcomes would also be appropriate in order to extend their scope so that they are clearly aligned with all of the taught material.

Life Science (MSc Cancer Cell Biology): Development of more detailed marking guidelines for complex assignments (i.e. research report/thesis), with feedback from markers clearly relating to such guidelines to enhance transparency and ensure fairness of assessment across the cohort.

Life Science: Implement the use of Turnitin software to help defend your academic standards against the very real risk of plagiarism.

3.3 Areas of good practice arising from External Examiner reports directed to individual Science Schools

Area	Summary of content
Assessment and marks	<p>EngInfo: Evidence of good moderation and double--marking practices.</p> <p>Life Science (<i>MSc Genetic Manipulation and Molecular Cell Biology</i>): Most of the scripts were well annotated with comments to make clear to the scrutineer and external examiner the strengths and weaknesses of the work.</p> <p>MPS: All work that I have seen had clear marking and clear comments provided.</p> <p>Psychology (<i>MSc Experimental Psychology</i>): Good range of assessments which enabled the students to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>Psychology (<i>MRes Psychological Methods</i>): I was impressed with the calibration of marking, with the level at which marks were awarded and with the feedback given to students.</p>
Processes	<p>EngInfo: Satisfied with the process for assessment, examination and determination of awards.</p> <p>Life Science: I am very content that the processes are sound, appropriate and fair.</p> <p>MPS: Processes are sound and appropriate.</p> <p>Psychology: Processes were sound, appropriate and fairly conducted.</p> <p>Psychology (<i>MSc Cognitive Neuroscience</i>): Fair and transparent marking process and provides a useful guide to the review of the marking process.</p>
Teaching, learning and assessment	<p>EngInfo: Very good feedback sheets that show clearly to students how to achieve the results they want to achieve.</p> <p>Life Science (<i>MSc Cancer Cell Biology</i>): Many excellent procedures are in place, for example evidence of proactive attention given to students' feedback is highly commendable.</p> <p>MPS: Research opportunities make the teaching more relevant and motivate students.</p> <p>Psychology: Students on the MSc Applied Psychology course achieve a very high standard with some excellent results. The quality of the internship portfolios was very high.</p>

T&L methods and opportunities	<p>EngInfo (MSc Mechanical Engineering; MSc Advanced Mechanical Engineering): Students have opportunities to display their abilities on a range of engineering activities encompassing practical work, engineering science and the use of engineering software analysis tools.</p> <p>Life Science (MSc Genetic Manipulation and Molecular Cell Biology): The course includes a good balance of taught elements and practical experience for the students.</p> <p>MPS: Students benefit from a wide range of teaching techniques, both classical and modern.</p> <p>Psychology (MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology and Mental Health): Feedback given to students is of a very high quality.</p>
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4.1 Summary of Arts & Humanities Schools External Examiner Reports

Area explored	English	HAHP	MFM	SCLS	General comments if area not fully agreed by EE
standards: appropriate	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	English: Overall the standard was appropriate, however, some of the first batches of sample work I saw included some examples of work that I considered not be of pass standard.
marking criteria: appropriate/consistent	4/4	4/5	8/8	1/1	HAHP: There is room for improvement in the published marking criteria for MA Contemporary History. The marking criteria is a little vague, and could be made more robust, facilitating more transparent interpretation. MFM: Some inconsistency in the application of requirements relating to written expression that can be addressed in the future.
performance: comparable	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	HAHP: Some essays and dissertations which demonstrated a poor command of written English.
learning outcomes: positive comments	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	HAHP (MA Contemporary History): I think work needs to be done on providing more robust definitions of learning outcomes.
marks awarded: appropriate	4/4	5/5	7/8	1/1	MFM: Having too many people involved in the marking does make it hard for any one person to have much of an overview of the cohort as a whole.
processes: sound, appropriate and fairly conducted	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	
teaching, learning and assessment: positive comments	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	
T&L methods and opportunities: positive comments	4/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	HAHP (MA Contemporary History): It would be helpful for there to be clearer and enforced guidelines on presentation.
materials: sufficient	3/4	5/5	8/8	1/1	English: Sometimes missing material (assessment questions as set).

4.2 General comments made by External Examiners which relates to individual Schools

English: I understand there is no requirement for a dissertation to be marked at 'Distinction' level in order for a 'Distinction' classification to be achieved. The school might be advised to give further consideration to this issue.

English (MA Applied Linguistics): There is a little inconsistency in feedback practice that needs to be ironed out. Some markers split feedback into sections and other do not. Some more clarity on the nature of assessment tasks, and the markers' assessment practices would benefit the examiner as well as the students.

HAHP (MA Contemporary History): The marking criteria could be made more clear and robust to ensure consistency between markers.

HAHP: Introduce more extensive training on presentation, footnoting etc.

HAHP: Careful consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the level of the language requirement for entrants to the courses. Sussex asks for a lower IELTS score than comparable institutions, and the impact of this is evident in some of the assessments produced.

MFM: I was disappointed that the MA teaching team were not required to be at the exam board.

MFM (MA Digital Documentary): Restricted range of marking in Documentary Practice, where the majority of marks fell within the 61-69 range; this could be linked to the rather large number of learning outcomes for this module, although there is no conclusive evidence for this.

MFM (MA Media Practice for International Development): It would be far better to have less markers involved in the process of looking at the final pieces of assessed work.

MFM: As many of the units are practice-based, resourcing and student access really needs to be addressed so that student experience is maintained as numbers rise.

SCLS: To clarify ethical procedures for dissertation research, particularly for amendments to research.

4.3 Areas of good practice arising from External Examiner reports directed to individual Schools

Area	Summary of content
Assessment and marks	<p>English (MA Applied Linguistics): It is good that students have the opportunity to get feedback on a research proposal before embarking on the highly weighted projects.</p> <p>HAHP: Markers are diligent and scrupulous in their assessments and the procedures applied are rigorous and consistent, which ensures fairness.</p> <p>MFM: Constructive and clear feedback on students' work throughout.</p> <p>SCLS (MA English Language Teaching): The marking is clear and helpful. There is a good balance between holistic and specific comments and the written feedback matches the grade descriptors well.</p>
Processes	<p>English: Tutors are to be commended on excellent marking, exacting judgements and the careful application of agreed criteria.</p> <p>English: I have full confidence in the assessment process and the conduct of the determination of awards.</p> <p>HAHP: Cases involving some more complex profile of results were handled in a clear and efficient manner at the exam board.</p>
Teaching, learning and assessment	<p>English (MA Modern and Contemporary Literature): The range of modules is rich and challenging.</p> <p>English: Evidence of rigorous co-marking and detailed feedback to students.</p> <p>HAHP: Imaginative and diverse with students benefitting from an excellent array of expertise and disciplinary and methodological approaches.</p> <p>HAHP: Feedback given to students is always very clear and constructive, so that students can see why they've been given the mark they've received.</p> <p>MFM: Some original and fascinating work which bodes well for future research development at PhD level for some.</p> <p>MFM: The level of provision of teaching aids – handouts, visual aids, exercises to reinforce the learning outcomes between sessions etc. is excellent.</p> <p>SCLS (MA English Language Teaching): The course continues to have a good balance between theory and practice.</p>

T&L methods and opportunities	<p>English (<i>MA Critical Theory; MA Sexual Dissidence</i>): The structure and intellectual dynamism of both degrees provides ample learning opportunities and student achievement.</p> <p>HAHP: The department offers some distinctive and innovative modules. HAHP: Teaching and learning opportunities are at a very high standard.</p> <p>MFM: A strength of the MA Digital Media course is the exploration of critical theory in practical projects and diversity of final options.</p>
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