

Summary and Analysis of Undergraduate External Examiner Reports 2015/16

Overall 98.6% reports were received by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office and distributed widely throughout the institution in line with agreed procedures (74/81 received giving a 98.6% response rate, given that 11 External Examiners had resigned by the end of 2015/16 as a result of industrial action (6 of these Externals who resigned did not submit their report resulting in 75 reports expected overall). This compared to a 100% response rate in 2014/15). 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. A proposed response to institutional issues that have been raised in External Examiner Reports have been set out below in italics.

Sections 2-4 provide a summary of data extracted from the External Examiner reports 2015/16 and areas of good practice amongst Schools.

Institutional Issues for 2015/16 (refer to relevant section for more detail)

- Timeframe for completing moderation for finalists at the end of the year is tight – *inclusion of level 6 submissions in ESEF should result in earlier availability of sample for moderation. Rationalisation of exam durations may result in shorter exams which will marginally reduce moderation workload. Ongoing review of use of exams. In addition, the new Vice-Chancellor has asked for a review of the academic year structure.*
- The prescribed method of moderation is disliked by some External Examiners in particular Schools – *During 2015/16 the University addressed this by publishing (i) FAQs to support External Examiners in understanding the prescribed process for moderation and (ii) by scheduling induction for new Externals in January in addition to the briefings that are scheduled annually in advance of the PABs. Attendance at the latter has been low but for those who attended understanding of the moderation process has improved. Targeted briefings for External Examiners and academics will be arranged for Schools with ongoing concerns.*
- Feedback varies greatly and is sometimes too generic – *University to review ESEF to see if technology can secure mark first and then allow individual feedback to student based on prior attainment and feedback. For 2016/17 resources are now available via Study Direct to support Academic Advisors in this.*
- Reference to Teaching and Learning methods and opportunities on External Examiner report form – *revise the wording on the report so that External Examiners are asked to reflect on Teaching and Learning methods based on the standard set of materials sent and not based on observation of teaching or access to the teaching resources.*

Update on Institutional issues from 2014/15

- Ongoing concerns regarding External Examiners workload and clarity of role in the moderation process – *the number of assessments where moderation was required may have reduced as a result of the regulations specifying that only assessments weighted at >30% needed to be moderated. In addition, the roll-out of ESEF to level 5 assessments meant that some moderation could be completed as soon as it was available electronically. ESEF also ensured that a standard set of information was provided to support moderation e.g. marking statistics for the cohort. FAQs were also published to support External Examiners.*
- Efficiency of PAB operation with boards running over a number of hours combined with loss of course oversight – *The BMEc PGT PAB and the Life Science UG PAB were scheduled in two consecutive sittings, with the business organised by discipline. Both sittings must be attended by a core members including the Chair, Deputy Chair, at least one External Examiner and at least one representative member. This was agreed to address the concerns raised.*
- Concern regarding discretion to offer sits as a result of impairment and whether it is being consistently applied – *PABs were given the following additional guidance to consider impairment ‘In cases of impairment or missed assessment components, students should be offered the opportunity to sit the assessment again, except where 1) even a module mark equivalent to the highest module mark they have achieved to date would not alter the classification of their degree; and/or 2) the impaired mark is not a class lower than any other module mark achieved in that year’.*