Section 1: Summary and analysis of postgraduate External Examiner reports 2018/19

1.1 Purpose of External Examiner

External examiners are one of the principle means by which we uphold our academic standards. External Examiners are usually academics employed by other universities. External Examiners support the University in ensuring that the University’s award requirements are appropriate and that the academic standards achieved by students are comparable to the sector. The University regularly reviews its policies and processes for external examining and ensures alignment with the UK Quality Code.

1.2 Appointment

An External Examiner is appointed to each course of study for a period of 4 years. A rigorous appointment process, aligned to the UK Quality Code, is in place to ensure that External Examiners are appropriately experienced and that they can carry out their role impartially, to provide independent scrutiny.

1.3 Induction

New External Examiners are primarily inducted through the material sent out by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement (ADQE) office and the School. All new and existing External Examiners are invited to an induction session scheduled during the year on the role of the External Examiner and on the Examination and Assessment Regulations. This includes an opportunity to meet with School faculty and students.

1.4 External Examiner role

Specific aspects of the External Examiner role include:

- signing off heavily weighted assessment tasks, for example exam papers or essay questions
- reviewing samples of completed assessments across the classification bands to establish that the outcomes are consistent and fair with reference to the marking criteria and assessment task
- attending the Progression and Award Board to ensure that the assessment procedures are applied consistently
- completing an annual report to help the University confirm that academic standards have been maintained
1.5 Annual Reports

Of the 99 reports expected by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office, 88 completed reports were received. These were distributed widely throughout the institution in line with agreed procedures. This gives us a response rate of 89%. This compared to a 76% response rate in 2017/18. 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 Education Committees in the Spring term and responses sent directly by the Chair of the Progression and Award Board (PAB) to external examiners. The reports and the action plans are reviewed during Annual Course Review. A proposed response to institutional issues that have been raised in external examiner reports have been set out below in italics.

Sections 2-4 below provide a summary of data extracted from the external examiner reports 2018/19 and areas of good practice amongst schools.

**Institutional Issues for 2018/19** (refer to relevant section for more detail)

- Concerns regarding feedback (consistency within and across modules, mismatch with mark given, quality, ‘feed-forward’, reference to marking criteria).
  
  *Proposed action during 2019/20: Schools to continue to review feedback practices with a view to providing more consistent and helpful feedback to students. Assessment and Feedback Working Group to review marking/feedback rubrics used and consider template rubric.*

- Accessibility of materials and Sussex Direct (some external examiners experienced difficulty in locating the materials they required or wished to have access to, other materials were not straight forward to navigate to or the external expected these to be accessible via the moderating pages). Many externals also found the system of accessing work to be moderated via an email link sent to their Sussex email account to be unsatisfactory.
  
  *Proposed action during 2019/20: ADQE to work with TEL to produce guide on accessing materials via Canvas. Review removal of option for externals to forward their Sussex email to their home institution email. Proposed action in the longer term: new system to have a single portal through which external examiners access materials and track progress of work.*

- Marking criteria (need to be accessible and consistently presented, consider having marking criteria for individual assessment).
  
  *Proposed action during 2019/20: Schools to review to ensure marking criteria are accessible to externals and students, that only approved versions are published and that they are appropriate for the assessment. Assessment and Feedback Working Group to review a sample of marking criteria.*

- Marking of exam scripts (some externals commented that it was not clear how marks were arrived at since marks for individual questions (and sometimes comments) were not written on the script/coversheet.
  
  *Proposed action during 2019/20: Schools to develop transparent process for markers in annotating exam scripts or cover sheets.*

**Update on Institutional Issues from 2017/18**

- Accessibility of materials and Sussex Direct (some external examiners experienced difficulty in locating all the materials they required or wished to have access to, other materials were not straight forward to navigate to or the Externals expected these to be accessible via the moderating pages). Some Externals also found the system of accessing work to be moderated via an email link sent to their Sussex email account to be unsatisfactory.
Proposed action: a single portal through which external examiners access materials and track progress of work will be considered going forwards. 
(Update: ADQE to work with TEL to produce guide on accessing materials via Canvas).

- Use and accessibility of marking criteria (some external examiners were unable to locate the marking criteria, or commented that feedback should refer to marking criteria and learning outcomes).
  Proposed action: Schools to make marking criteria more accessible and to review feedback process to include reference to marking criteria and learning outcomes. (Update: guide for externals on accessibility; Assessment and Feedback Working Group to consider feedback)

- Extend range of assessment modes used across some courses for employability purposes and to support inclusivity.
  Proposed action: Schools to review assessments across the course to support student experience. (Update: referred to Assessment and Feedback Working Group)

- Concerns regarding feedback (consistency within and across modules, mismatch with mark given, quality, ‘feed-forward’).
  Proposed action: Schools to implement feedback norms and grids/forms, with reference to marking criteria and learning outcomes, to address these issues. (Update: referred to Assessment and Feedback Working Group)