

1. Summary and Analysis of Postgraduate External Examiners Reports 2016/17

Of the 102 reports expected by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office 89 completed reports were received. These were distributed widely throughout the institution in line with agreed procedures. This gives us a response rate of 87% . This compared to an 76% response rate in 2015/16 (this excluded reports from 9 external examiners who had resigned). 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 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 provide a summary of data extracted from the External Examiner reports 2016/17 and areas of good practice amongst Schools.

Institutional Issues for 2016/17 (refer to relevant section for more detail)

- Accessibility of materials and use of Sussex Direct – a number of External Examiners experienced difficulty in locating all the materials they required or wished to have access to (because the materials were unavailable, were not straight forward to navigate to or because 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 – *SAAT project to work on creating single portal through which external examiners can access materials and track progress of work.*
- A minority of external examiners have expressed disagreement with aspects of the University's regulations including the approach to borderline cases - *It is important to continue to engage in discussions on these issues with examiners through briefing and induction events, but also to note that regulations vary between institutions and that Sussex's have been approved as appropriate to maintain standards through normal committee processes.*
- Feedback varies across and within Schools (occasionally too brief or unclear, not aligned to mark and marking criteria) – *Schools to develop and implement feedback norm in School to ensure appropriate feedback is given within and across modules.*

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

- Individual response to External Examiners regarding institutional issues raised in reports – *it was not feasible for the PVC (T&L) to respond to institutional issues raised by individual external examiners, but communication with external examiners and schools to explain how responses would be received was improved by (i) sending the PGT summary (once approved by UTLC) separately to inform External Examiners of the University's response to issues raised (previously this was sent with the annual letter for external examiners) and (ii) reminding relevant staff in schools that for School level issues, the Deputy Chair of the PAB must send the External Examiner the action plan approved by STL).*

- Concerns regarding application of the discretionary regulations - *guidance on application of the discretionary regulations was provided through briefing sessions for external examiners prior to PABs and at the annual External Examiner Induction Day.*
- 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. (Few negative comments were received on the method of moderation in 2016/17.)*
- Feedback varies greatly across and within Schools (occasionally too generic, too brief or unclear, not aligned to mark and marking criteria –*Consider providing guidance to Schools. Also 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 were made available via Study Direct to support Academic Advisors in this.*