

LTC16D086

Title: HUM REPORT ON EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS (UG &PGT)
2015/16
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Issue

HUM report on external examiners' reports 2015/16

Recommendation

Recipients are invited:
To note and consider the report

Resource Implications

None

Risk Implications

Low – but risk to QA process if issues not considered

Equality and Diversity

None considered.

Timing of decisions

Further Information

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Background

Agenda item for LTC, 15/iii/2017

Discussion

Having reviewed External Examiner reports for the faculty of Arts and Humanities for 2015-16, what follows is a digest of common, or recurring, comments, themes and issues raised by external examiners.

Examples of good practice:

All external examiner reports were generally very positive, and no serious concerns were raised by them. Indeed, examples of good practice were noted by all external examiners. A number of reports praised the variety of innovative assessment practices across the faculty, and all noted that feedback to students on their work was of a high quality. Without exception all external examiners noted: that marking was rigorous, fair and accurate, and reflected learning outcomes exceptionally well; and that student standards of achievement are high, and that these standards are robust and in line with those in other UK universities.

Many (though not all) externals commented favourably on the move to giving them access to work samples electronically (via Blackboard). Those that did comment on this noted that it made their roles significantly easier to manage, and expedited the process for them.

All externals offered thanks (and words of praise) to LTS colleagues and Chairs of Exam Boards.

Common Issues raised by Externals:

1. Overall (as noted above) the use of Blackboard to provide samples to externals was seen as very good. However, a couple of reports asked that the scan quality for work samples needs to be checked to make sure they are readable.
2. Externals also encouraged markers to use the full range of marks available, especially in the first-class category.
3. There were some comments about wide variations in the quantity and quality of feedback within modules with more than one marker. (In one case, an examiner asked the school to think about the usefulness to students of very long summative comments / feedback. The marker pointed out that this was an issue not just about improving learning outcomes for students, but about demands on markers' time).
4. Some worries were expressed by externals about using a single summative piece to assess a module; more variety of assessment was advised in such cases.
5. Those externals who have served at UEA for a longer term commented on the change of regulations from CCS and BIM. All noted the exemplary practice of Chairs of Exam Boards in explaining the change, but also asked for reassurances that students were not being disadvantaged by this change and asked for data comparing overall performance between the two systems.
6. A number of externals in one (recently re-structured) school noted regret that Exam Boards were held at school – rather than subject – level. They (and, in fact, other externals) also commented on the extent to which Exam Boards have become 'faceless' exercises, ratifying marks rather than engaging in discussions around teaching strategies and learning outcomes. These externals all suggested that meetings with teaching teams, in addition to them attending exam boards, would be beneficial.
7. Many externals noted they had not received feedback over actions taken by (and discussions had in) schools in response to comments and recommendations they had made in their previous year's report.
8. Though still extremely positive, externals expressed more general grumbles and worries around processes and practices in PGT courses than UG. A number of concerns were raised, especially, about practice-based / creative dissertations and how marking criteria operate in such cases.

Some observations by AD-L&T:

There seems to be quite a lot of difference between individual externals as to how much sample work is sent to them (though this is difficult to know as external examiner reports don't indicate this). Compared with my own (very extensive) experience as an external examiner, even those externals who receive the most work are not receiving large amounts. At other institutions I might normally be expected to look at work samples from *at least* 12 modules; here the most that externals seemed to be commenting on was around ten modules, in many cases substantially less than this. I may be mistaken in this, but it would be worthwhile finding out if this is the case.

Related to this, some programmes / schools have what seems to be a disproportionately large number of externals. This is especially the case at PGT. Some efficiencies might be made here.

Suggested actions:

In relation to 'Issues' raised above:

1. Ensure scan quality of samples
2. Take comment back to school teaching committees
3. Take comment back to school teaching committees; feed into HUM's current assessment and feedback project
4. Take comment back to school teaching committees; note at LTC
5. Provide this data to externals
6. Arrange meetings between teaching teams and externals when externals are present at UEA
7. Ensure externals receive feedback on their annual reports
8. Take comment back to school teaching committees

In relation to AD observations:

Schools and LTC to consider how to best use (but not overwork) externals.

Attachments

None