EXTERNAL EXAMINERS’ BRIEFING DAY

WELCOME

Tuesday 23rd January 2018

WELCOME TO BROOKES

Prof. Julie McLeod
PVC for the Student Experience
AGENDA

- Presentations:
  - Updates from the Academic Registrar
  - The OBU Assessment Compact
  - The reporting (and responding) cycle
  - The external examiner experience at OBU
  - Conceptions of academic standards in external examining
- 11.15am: Refreshment break
- Discussion groups
- 12.45 Plenary (Q&A/feedback from discussions)
- 1pm: Lunch - with Programme Leads, followed by meetings with programme teams, visits to Departments, etc.

- Supporting information is included in delegate packs

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS BRIEFING DAY

Assessment design, marking and moderation at OBU
Gina Dalton
Associate Dean (Student Experience)
Faculty of Technology, Design & Environment
I'M GOING TO COVER...

• Basic ‘landscape’ of key documents/process
• The Assessment Compact
  • https://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/brookes--assessment-compact/
• An overview of a Faculty approach to assessment, marking and moderation including how this is documented
• Importance of ExEx agreeing specifics with Programme Team

BROOKES ASSESSMENT COMPACT (2009) - FIVE TENETS

1. Effective assessment is **central to learning**.
2. To be effective the **relational nature of the assessment and feedback** process needs to be emphasised, particularly in terms of the need for **active dialogue between students and staff**.
3. To be effective, assessment must be recognised as a **joint responsibility** between staff and students.
4. The ability to assess, the work of both self and others, is an **essential skill** for all graduates.
5. For the above tenets to be met in full, students and staff need to be ‘**assessment literate**’ and actively participate in disciplinary communities of assessment practice.
ASSESSMENT COMPACT - HOW YOU WILL COME ACROSS IT (HANDOUT)

1. Assessment fundamental to design of programmes - TLA strategy in Programme Specification
2. Link between learning outcomes and assessment tasks explicit in Module Descriptors
3. Students made aware of assessment criteria for assignments and feedback is against those criteria
4. Programme assessment schedule - including feedback dates
5. Assessment literacy tasks – peer marking activity, exemplars

PRE-ASSESSMENT – GENERAL PRINCIPLES

• Role of ExEx handbook - duties
• Draft assignment coursework briefs and examination papers made available to ExEx to comment on
• Alignment to learning outcomes/programme and basic checking already done, student-facing aspects planned
• Practicalities of this may vary – Moodle, Google, Cloud, VLE, email etc.
POST ASSESSMENT – INTERNAL/PEER MODERATION

• Each Faculty has its own moderation policy which reflect difference in disciplines and ExEx arrangement

• Internal moderation – several approaches eg:
  • Representative sample across range is **second marked** by a member of staff or appointed moderator
  • **Double marking** of whole cohort
  • Blind or sited (usual that dissertations/projects are double marked blind)

Overall moderation process and specific internal moderation carried out for a particular module run made clear to ExEx.

VISIBILITY OF INTERNAL/PEER MODERATION TO EXEX

• Moderation report for each module with module ‘pack’
• Marking/assignment brief for student signed
• Comments on actual work
• Signed marksheet
**POST ASSESSMENT – EXTERNAL MODERATION – SAMPLES FOR EXEX**

- Samples for ExEx and their selection varies:
  - risk based approach rather than a fixed number
  - access via VLE to whole cohort’s work - choice of samples decided by team
  - Chosen by module leader or programme administrator
  - generally 10% with a minimum of 6 across range plus fails/resits

**CHANGES AS A RESULT OF MODERATION**

- Depends on what the issue is.
- Peer moderation issues should be resolved before external moderation (ie. the ExEx is NOT another marker!). Programme Lead to resolve way forward.
- External moderation issues – any changes cannot be made to the sample in isolation.
- Exam Committee to agree one grade/mark
Update from the Academic Registrar
John Kirk
Director of Academic & Student Affairs
and Academic Registrar

Developments at Oxford Brookes

• Academic Framework Review (Years of study, acceptable modules, timing of choice, Programme Learning Outcomes, Combinations)

• Student Record System (programme configuration)

• Timetabling

• Mitigating Circumstances
EXTERNAL EXAMINERS BRIEFING DAY

QUESTIONS?

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS BRIEFING DAY

Reports and responses
Liz Turner
Head of Academic Policy & Quality Office
Being a critical friend

- EEs have a wide ranging role: assurance for the University and sector; enhancement for the Programme;

  "It is my firm belief that an external examiner should be a critical friend and there have been times when I have challenged the committee, hopefully in a constructive way. I would therefore like to thank all members of the SEC for their patience and good humour when subjected to my opinion…"

- EEs make a significant contribution to enhancement of our programmes; and often comment on the willingness of programme teams to engage in conversations with them about how to make improvements;

- Programme teams use EE reports as evidence for annual programme reviews, and welcome critical analysis/commentary, which may lead to:
  - Changes to module delivery/assessment strategies
  - Improvements to marking, moderation and feedback
  - Improved administrative processes, incl. examination committees

REPORTS – receipt and response

- **When** should you complete your report?
  - Check with your Programme Lead - APQO will send general reminders in June (UG) or Dec (PG)
  - Report is usually due within a month of examination committee

- **How** do you complete the report?
  - YES/NO standards questions – with/without qualification
  - Consistency with your own experience and national reference points – FHEQ, subject benchmarks, qualification characteristics, etc.
  - Professional expectations and PSRB requirements
  - Currency – curriculum; teaching and learning; graduate employability
  - Collaborative arrangements – comparability of standards
  - Strengths/Weaknesses, suggestions for enhancement – ?meeting students
  - Assessment and awards – samples of work; standards/consistency of marking and moderation; operation of examination committees
  - Issues for consideration by Faculty or University Executive – serious concerns can be reported directly to the VC
REPORTS – receipt and response

What happens to the report?
- Circulated to Programme Lead and Associate Dean for Student Experience, for initial response (within a few weeks)
- Followed up by a copy of the action plan from the Annual Programme Review report (takes place November – January)
- Any concerns about academic or professional standards, or the integrity of the assessment process, triggers immediate action by the Faculty
- Response to wider issues - if raised - will come from appropriate member of senior staff in the Faculty or University
- Published via Personal Information Portal
- Annual overview report of all EE reports written by Head of APQO for the Academic Enhancement & Standards Committee

How do you get paid?
- Fee is paid on receipt of report by externals@brookes.ac.uk
- Expenses are claimed on separate form (on website)
- Currently reviewing arrangements for payments to EEs

Themes from last year’s reports

Many commendations:
- Standards of student achievement; staff commitment to student success
- Curriculum content; research-informed teaching
- Links with industry; quality of professional placements; field trips
- Assessment design; standards of marking; quality of feedback
- Administrative arrangements; conduct of exam committees

Some inconsistencies identified, for example:
- Samples of assessed work (size/scope) and accompanying documentation;
- Documentation of the internal moderation process;
- Quality of feedback provided for students;
- Involvement in approving draft exam papers/assignment briefs (potentially limiting the extent to which EEs can develop a shared understanding of the standards being applied by the Brookes programme teams)
The External Examiner Experience at Oxford Brookes

Any thoughts you would like to share on the experience so far?

Feedback on the EE experience

- I am sad to say farewell to my role as external examiner. Working alongside your programme teams – in which I include both academic faculty and professional administrative support - has been a great experience. I have been impressed with the dedication to excellence that typifies all activities. Documentation is comprehensive and detailed, and the effort devoted to maintaining standards and developing innovative provision, while also supporting students on their educational journey, is truly first class. It is clear that students and standards matter equally to the programme teams, and this is testament to the high standard of Programme Leadership that characterises everything that I have seen on these programmes over the past four years.

- This is my final report of my hugely rewarding four year tenure as external examiner. I have enjoyed working with a team who have been efficient in providing me with the materials to do my job, have been prepared to change, have taken on board advice swiftly and efficiently and have always been wonderfully welcoming. Thank you for my time as external examiner.
The external examiner's role in assuring academic standards – discussion group briefing

Liz Turner
Head of Academic Policy & Quality Office

Conceptions of academic standards in external examining: research context

“one of the principal means for maintaining UK threshold academic standards within autonomous higher education institutions” (QAA, 2011, B7)

“the external examining system works well on the whole, and does not require a major overhaul.” (Universities UK, 2011, para 8)

“the external examining process should be made more transparent and should be better explained [...] a nationally agreed and mandatory set of minimum expectations for the role of all external examiners should be developed and implemented.” (QAA, 2009)

Introduction of fees
Massification, introduction of new subjects, collaboration & internationalisation
Accountability to stakeholders

Assessment criteria as contract with students

Move from arbiter of standards to critical friend

University ranking lists

Deearing Report recommended a pool of accredited examiners, consistent training for external examiners, and archiving scripts to help maintain standards over time. (NCHE, 1997)
Academic standards in external examining: symbolic, or actual measure of comparability?

'External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining UK threshold academic standards within autonomous higher education institutions’ (UK Quality Code for HE) – EE system is highly valued within the sector and well respected internationally.

ASKE research challenges the assumption that we can hold knowledge of standards in a way which is consistent among people and over time, as is presumed by the notion of external examiners assuring comparability of standards.

“Little evidence” to support the view that external examiners are an effective means to safeguard academic standards...

Two projects

Project 1 (2013):
Central question - How are academic standards conceived and applied in external examining?

Project 2 (2015):
- Review of implementation of Finch Report (2011) recommendations across sector;
- Assessment of effectiveness of the external examining system in safeguarding standards and maintaining the confidence of stakeholders;
- Identified further changes required for future (informed HEFCE future approaches/revised operating model for QA, and HEA pilot of training for EEs).
‘Drift’ in external examiner’s role?

EEs are expected to comment on both
• ‘academic standards’ = standards of student attainment and
• ‘quality standards’ = standards in the assessment cycle, such as task setting, marking, feedback, moderation, and examination committees

Research highlights evidence of ‘drift’ towards the latter (‘process checker’) as main focus of role.

How are academic standards conceived?

competency processes

docs

School Attended
Belief in education as public good
Influence of

the individual

Work experience in industry
Grammar fanatic

student work
Two areas dominate the domain of external examining and standards

Custodian of what?
Custodian of discipline standards versus custodian of assessment procedures

Whose standards?
Awarding institutions standards used versus imported standards used

Conceptualisation of the examiner’s role

**Custodian of discipline standards**

**National Safeguarder**
"...basically an external examiner needs to endorse whether we are following the QAA standards or not. [...] I’m always reading QAA benchmark statements and handbooks, what is a level 7 module and a C module, [...] So it’s a external examiner’s responsibility to be the guru of all those handbooks".

**Independent**
"It’s a bit of a cliché but I draw on the fact that I’ve been teaching for 29 years and from that time, of being used to evaluating what is a first, what is a 2(i), what is a 2(ii), a third or a fail, and a vast amount of it comes from experience".

**Process Checker**
"I will use the criteria laid down by the institution … and certainly as an external examiner, I’m not paid to mark in the way that I mark, I’m paid to comment on the way they have marked, using their criteria".

**Thwarted Independent**
"Now you basically rubber stamp and that’s why we’re there. You’re not allowed to change marks or allowed to intervene. There are no vivas. So you turn up to the exam board, you [say], ‘Yeah, I saw the exams and they were OK’ and that’s it. It has changed a great deal".

**Custodian of assessment procedures**
Conclusions and recommendations

- External examiners have contrasting views of the role.
- There is considerable potential for variation in interpretation of judgements on standards.
- EEs’ awareness of the provenance of their standards and the uniqueness of their own standards framework should be raised.
- Safeguarding standards can’t be achieved by process checking alone.
- External examiners should be encouraged to engage more fully with explicit standards (national and local reference points) and participate in discussion about standards within the discipline within the institution where they are an examiner (engaging in community processes), to share and develop understanding of standards.
- Professionalisation of the role: systematic training on e.g. assessment literacy (HEA pilot); external examiners taking part in regular calibration of their standards, organised by their disciplinary communities.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- Group lists are in your delegate packs, along with your breakout room number and suggestions for topics of conversation.

- Facilitators will coordinate the discussions and make a note of any key questions/comments.

- We’ll meet in Gibbs 2.16a at 12.45pm, for a brief plenary before returning to the Restaurant for lunch.
Things to ask your Programme Lead

- Where can I find programme and module information, (and the previous EE’s reports)?
- At what stage/s will I be involved in the assessment process?
- When will I be asked to approve draft assignment briefs/exam papers?
- When, and how, can I expect to receive samples of assessed work?
- What information will accompany the samples (module stats, marking schemes, module handbooks, etc)?
- How will I review non-written assessments (e.g. presentations)?
- Will I be visiting partner organisations, placements, or meeting with students on-campus?
- What processes are in place to ensure the consistency of marking across the programme team?
- How is the internal moderation process documented, and monitored?
- When is the exam committee meeting?
- Any others you have thought of during the morning…