

University of Birmingham

Changes to the Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for Taught Programmes

Purpose of Paper

1. To propose changes for effect from 1st January 2011 to the Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for Taught Programmes.

Proposals

2. APRC is requested to approve the changes as set out in Appendix 1.

Background

3. At present the University operates a system of profiling to determine the degree classifications of undergraduate students according to designated ranges.
4. The primary role of External Examiners within this system is to quality assure the accuracy and consistency of marking standards across the range of modules in relation to the published marking criteria of the School or Department. External Examiners are asked to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the marking standards, with the agreed module marks then used in the profiling system.
5. The current Code of Practice on External Examiners (specifically Section 5: Participation in Assessment Procedures) contains statements that are inconsistent with the primary role of External Examiners in a university that operates a system of profiling for the determination of degree classes. An example of this is clause 5.6 in the current Code of Practice which states:
External Examiners should as a minimum be given:
.1 a sample of scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the mark range;
.2 all scripts of borderline candidates; and
.3 all scripts assessed internally as first class or as failures.
6. The suggested amendments would need to come into effect as of 1st January 2011 in order for them to be in use for the main examination period of 2010/11 academic session onwards.

Arguments in Support of Proposal

7. The Code of Practice requires revision to ensure that:
 - (i) the role of External Examiners is clear in relation to the system used by the University to determine the degree class of borderline candidates i.e. to confirm marking standards;
 - (ii) Boards of Examiners determine degree classes of borderline candidates solely on the basis of their profile, and;
 - (iii) there is consistency in the system used to determine the degree class of borderline candidates across all Schools.

Mark Jeffery, Academic Quality Officer, November 2010

Appendix 1

Proposed amendments to Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for Taught Programmes

5. Participation in Assessment Procedures			
	Current Code of Practice		Revised Code of Practice
.1	An External Examiner has a general right to see all items of assessment, of whatever nature, which contribute to the overall result of an award.	.1	An External Examiner has a general right to see all items of assessment, of whatever nature, which contribute to the overall result of an award. External Examiners should also be provided with marking schemes or criteria used in relation to assessment.
.2	All draft degree examination papers must be sent to an External Examiner for approval. An External Examiner may be asked to comment on the questions or papers that have been set and make any recommendations that they feel are appropriate.	.2	All draft degree examination papers must be sent to an External Examiner for approval, together with model answers where appropriate.
.3	In some subjects it may be essential for model answers to be prepared and scrutinised.	.3	(New 5.3) For degree programmes with only one appointed External Examiner, the Examiner should have access to all work for each module that contributes to the final degree classification. Where a team of External Examiners is appointed to a programme, modules should be allocated to individual examiners by agreement on the basis of their expertise.

<p>.4 An External Examiner has the right to see all degree examination scripts.</p>	<p>.4 (New 5.4)</p> <p>The External Examiner's role is to consider the consistency and accuracy of marking standards for programmes, through reviewing marking within units of assessment of a module, and between modules.</p> <p>External Examiners should be provided with a mark spreadsheet for each module to which they have been assigned. The Examiner should read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) a selection of scripts across the full mark range (including, for team-taught modules, a selection which shows the full mark range for each examination question) (b) a selection of coursework assessment across the full mark range.
<p>.5 If the inviting School is to make a selection of scripts to be sent to an External Examiner, the principles for such selection will be determined by agreement with the External Examiner in advance. The guiding principle for any selection of scripts is that an External Examiner should have enough evidence to determine that internal marking and classification are is of an appropriate standard.</p>	<p>.5 When examination scripts and coursework assessment are sent to the External Examiner for scrutiny, the School must agree in advance with the External Examiner the scope of the sample, within the parameters outlined in 5.4 above, which will provide enough evidence for the External Examiner to determine that internal marking is of an appropriate standard. ,.</p>
<p>.6 External Examiners should as a minimum be given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> .1 a sample of scripts from the top, the middle and the bottom of the mark range; .2 all scripts of borderline candidates; and 	

	.3 all scripts assessed internally as first class or as failures.		
.7	<p>An External Examiner has the right to see any work that contributes to the assessment and degree classification e.g. projects and other work. In some cases it may be agreed that the School should make a selection of such work to be sent to the External Examiner, the principles for such selection being agreed with her or him in advance.</p> <p>In addition, External Examiners should also have access to all relevant information and policies relating to Mitigations Panels held by the School. (Move to new 5.9)</p>		
.8	<p>If an external examiner does not agree with marks awarded within a sample they may request further action such as the re-marking or moderation of the cohort of students' work.</p>	.6	<p>(New 5.6)</p> <p>If an External Examiner does not agree with marks awarded within a sample they may propose a level of moderation (additional to that undertaken under School policy), or re-marking. This should apply to all students who had undertaken the unit of assessment.</p>
.9	<p>External Examiners should not be expected to adjudicate between internal markers. Disagreements between internal markers should be resolved before a sample of work is seen by the External Examiner. This may be through the use of a third marker, or consultation with senior colleagues within the School. In all cases it should be transparent to the external examiner how the final mark was decided.</p> <p>The views of an External Examiner should be particularly influential if, exceptionally, a mark has not been agreed internally for a particular unit of assessment. (Separate this para out into a new 5.8)</p>	.7	<p>External Examiners should not normally be expected to adjudicate between internal markers. Disagreements between internal markers should be resolved before a sample of work is seen by the External Examiner. This may be through the use of a third marker, or consultation with senior colleagues within the School. In all cases it should be transparent to the External Examiner how the final mark was decided.</p>
		.8	<p>(New 5.8)</p>

			If, in exceptional cases, a mark has not been agreed internally, an External Examiner should be consulted to determine an agreed mark.
		.9 (New 5.9)	External Examiners should be informed, in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners, of the recommendations to be made by the Mitigations Panel/s, including relevant supporting information where appropriate.
.10	External Examiners, as full members of the relevant Board of Examiners, have the right to be present at all Examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken in regard to the subject with which they have been concerned (including the setting of papers). They are normally required to be present at any meeting where degree examination results are determined for the subject(s) in which they have been involved. In all cases, External Examiners' approval must be obtained for any change to a result that they have previously agreed.	.10	External Examiners, as full members of the relevant Board of Examiners, have the right to be present at all Examiners' meetings at which significant decisions are to be taken in regard to the subject with which they have been concerned (including the setting of papers). They are normally required to be present at any meeting where degree examination results are determined for the subject(s) in which they have been involved. In all cases, External Examiners' approval must be obtained for any change to a result that they have previously agreed.
.11	The signature of an External Examiner must be appended to the list of any degree examination results arising from the Board of Examiners of which he or she is a member, as evidence that he or she endorses the classification.	.11	The signature of an External Examiner must be appended to the list of any degree examination results arising from the Board of Examiners of which he or she is a member, as evidence that he or she endorses the classification.
.12	External Examiners are encouraged to comment on the assessment process and the schemes for marking and classification. In some subjects participation in the devising of		

	<p>such schemes may be essential. External Examiners may often be able to give valuable advice to internal examiners, especially the inexperienced, either directly or through the Head of School.</p>		
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