

**QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP**  
**Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

**Present:** J Taylor (Chair), M Barnard, R Chater, A Diaz, J Edwards, K Jones, C Merrett, N Silvennoinen (Secretary), C Symonds

**In attendance:** S Fereday, L Hutchings, F Willcocks

**Apologies:** B Dyer, G Willcocks, K Randall, R Dolling, H Impett, D Sparrowhawk

**1 Minutes of last meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Lianne Hutchings.
- 1.2 The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record. The following were noted under matters arising.
- 1.2.1 Minute 1.2.1: The Chair confirmed that students would continue to be charged for copies of their exam papers to cover the associated administrative cost. However, students would continue to be able to view their exam papers free of charge.
- 1.2.1 Minute 1.2.3: The Chair reported that Educational Development and Quality (EDQ) was progressing an outstanding action from September to prepare staff guidelines on the minimum expectation of exam feed forward/feedback and collating existing student facing guidance on assessment processes.
- 1.2.2 Minute 2.2.6: It was confirmed that the first part of the External examining annual report had been submitted to ASC in December. EDQ would take forward the agreed actions and liaise with Schools as appropriate.
- 1.2.3 Minute 2.3: Actions relating to the preparation of a new University Policy and Procedure - External Examining would be discussed under agenda item 2. The Academic Administration Managers had been invited to attend this agenda item to discuss the proposed draft with members.

**2 Review of external examining**

- 2.1 The draft Policy and Procedure on External Examining had been prepared to align the University's current practice with sector expectations by September 2012. In November, members had raised a number of queries relating to potential areas of change which EDQ had followed up. These were highlighted in the proposed draft which was now submitted to the Quality Assurance Standing Group (QASG) for further discussion.
- 2.2 Members discussed the paper and recommended the following changes to the draft policy and procedure prior to submission to Academic Standards Committee (ASC):
- i) engagement of external examiners in Level C of standard degree programmes and Level M of research degrees: that the University continues not to involve external examiners in Level C of standard degree programmes. This is supported by sector research and the new Quality Code which allows institutions to take a view that external examiners endorse the 'component parts' of the award they are responsible for.
- External examiners would continue to be required to comment on modifications to Level C of standard degree programmes.
- External examiners would also continue to be required for research degree programmes which include an assessed credit-bearing M-Level component.
- ii) external examiner engagement with clinical assessors: that EDQ and HSC agree how to address this requirement prior to submission to ASC. *[Secretary's note: the final draft now includes a proposal to engage external examiners directly or indirectly with clinical assessors.]*

- iii) BU staff workload planning and external examiner commitments: that the Chair discusses the issue with the Head of Staff Development prior to the February meeting of ASC.
- iv) the future role of industrial external examiners: that industrial external examiners are appointed in exceptional circumstances only.
- v) reciprocal arrangements: that all Schools maintain up-to-date records of academic staff members' external examiner duties in other institutions in order to ensure that any arrangements which would result in reciprocity can be ruled out during the nomination process. The nomination form already includes a declaration to this effect. It was noted that once the new Human Resources database was fully developed it would replace local records.

Partner institution staff's external examining duties would be included annually in the honorary contracts which EDQ could access during the nomination process.

- vi) external examiner allocation to named programme(s) and units: that each external examiner will have sole or joint responsibility for at least one named award and typically 6-12 units.

Some concern was expressed whether this arrangement would be achievable where common units are employed across programmes/frameworks and it was agreed that Schools email EDQ any concerns which might prevent this model from being employed by 27<sup>th</sup> January *[Secretary's note: no concerns were raised and the final draft now includes a proposed allocation model which reflects QASG agreement.]*

- vii) access to live assessments: where live assessments make up 100% of coursework, external examiners must be granted access to an agreed sample size. This may be made available through a recording where attendance is not feasible.
- viii) access to longitudinal stats: that EDQ contacts Student Administration to establish whether Qlikview can generate reports with historical data. *[Secretary's note: depending on the requirements, in theory it is possible to create reports for this purpose.]*
- ix) the use of external examiners in vivas: that external examiners are allowed to observe, but not to conduct, vivas in order to comment on the assessment processes.
- x) access to myBU: that EDQ and the Library and Learning Support (LLS) agree the level of access to myBU that all external examiners will be provided with upon appointment. *[Secretary's note: the final draft now includes a proposal for external examiner access to myBU.]*
- xi) review of assessed work: that current practice whereby the sample size of students' assessed work is agreed with external examiners by negotiation is reviewed as part of the review of the University's Independent Marking Policy.
- xii) frequency of external examiner reports: that external examiners continue to report to the University annually, normally within two weeks of the Assessment Board meeting at which external examiner involvement is required.
- xiii) external examiner appointment periods: that the University adopts a four-year appointment cycle whereby appointments commence in October and finish in September. The period from February 2012 – September 2012 should be utilised to align all new external examiner appointments accordingly to allow for a phased transition.
- xiv) endorsement of students' results: that where external examiner presence is not possible, another member of the framework/programme external examining team may exceptionally sign the spreadsheet.

Where an external examiner refuses to endorse the Board outcomes and no agreement is reached, the disagreement is referred to the Chair of ASC for resolution before the Board may confirm the disputed marks and confer the awards on behalf of Senate.

- xv) fee structure: that the Directors of Operations discuss the proposals and agree a fee structure which supports the new programme and unit allocation system.

2.2 Members agreed the following actions and recommendations:

- 2.2.1 **ACTION:** Moderation of online assessments by external and internal assessors to be discussed at the March meeting of QASG when the current Independent Marking Policy is considered. Also to include the above action in Section 2.1 xi to establish whether a minimum sample size of students' assessed work should be required for the purposes of moderation by external examiners.
- 2.2.2 **ACTION:** EDQ to finalise the proposed policy and procedure for submission to ASC in February 2012.
- 2.2.3 **RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** that the proposed Policy and Procedure - External Examining be recommended for Senate approval (see separate paper).

### 3 Review of the definition of 'moderation'

- 3.1 The chair outlined the background to the proposed review of the definition of 'moderation', noting that the University needed to consider again how the term was used. Currently, the term was used to describe different processes. Firstly, to describe the process of scrutinising students' assessed work to establish whether the marker(s) had applied appropriate assessment criteria and utilised a full range of marks. Typically, this activity was undertaken by external examiners but also by link tutors for partner provision. The term was also used to describe adjustment of marks undertaken by Assessment Boards. Members agreed that the latter should be referred to as 'adjustment' or 'rescaling' rather than moderation and suggested that the definitions be clarified in the next revision of the Independent Marking Policy.
- 3.2 **Action:** EDQ to clarify the definitions 'moderation', 'adjustment' and 'rescaling' for discussion at the March meeting of QASG when revisions to the current Independent Marking Policy would be considered.

### 4 Review of mitigating circumstances

- 4.1 Members had received a paper outlining the background to the review of the University's current Code of Practice on Mitigating Circumstances, proposed areas of potential policy change, streamlining of current documentation, and associated timescales for implementation.
- 4.2 Members discussed the proposed changes and agreed the following:
- i) Assessment Board discretion: QASG was asked to consider whether an Assessment Board could exercise discretion where mitigation is established and request an adjustment of marks beyond the standard compensation rule if it deemed that the relevant intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for unit(s) or level had been met. QASG rejected this proposal but agreed that a student who has marginally failed an assessment due to mitigation could be asked to submit an alternative, shorter piece of assessment to address the missing ILOs.
  - ii) The sealed envelope: QASG discussed the current practice of students being able to submit evidence of mitigation in a sealed envelope directly to an Assessment Board which was then considered only if the degree classification or unit pass was borderline. QASG expressed concern that the process and potential outcomes were different from those for students whose mitigation is considered through Circumstances Boards. It was recommended that from 2012-13 all evidence of mitigation must be submitted to the relevant Circumstance Board to ensure parity in the way the validity of all students' circumstances is established and to ensure equitable outcomes. Members emphasised that the Circumstance Board process was sufficiently discreet and would not compromise confidentiality in any way. The Assessment Board would therefore exercise the same decisions as it would for any other student with valid circumstances.

Members expressed concern that students who submitted mitigation were often under the impression that their marks would be lifted up by the Board if their circumstances were

deemed valid and it was agreed that student facing guidance, including the new policy and procedure, should emphasise that this is not the case.

- iii) Chairing arrangements for partner institution Circumstance Boards: The proposal to transfer the responsibility for chairing of partner institution Circumstance Boards back to academic Schools was discussed and Members suggested that the Academic Partnerships representative seek Partnership Coordinators and Academic Administration Managers' views on the proposals. If agreed, the revised chairing arrangements would take effect from the current academic year.
- iv) Self-certification: Members expressed concern that the self-certified sickness declaration form had not been formalised in the current Code of Practice although it was offered by staff to some students. QASG agreed unanimously that applications for assignment extensions/exam postponement or board consideration should always be supported by independent evidence and proposed that the form be withdrawn from September 2012.
- v) Mitigating circumstances grading: It was proposed that the current grade 1 which had caused ambiguity, and had hence been used inconsistently by Schools, be discarded. If supported by ASC, the new grades 0, 1 and 2, should be adopted as outlined in the proposal for the current cycle and reflected in a revised *Academic Procedure D6 – Use of Assessment Regulations*. Members fully supported the new simplified circumstances grading structure which would help ensure consistent outcomes for all students.

4.3 The following actions and recommendations were recorded:

- 4.3.1 **Action:** EDQ to amend the draft policy and procedure as per 4.2 above for submission to ASC in February.
- 4.3.2 **Action:** Academic Partnerships representative to consult Schools on the proposed transfer of partner Circumstance Board chairing arrangements back to Schools.
- 4.3.3 **RECOMMENDATION TO ASC:** that the proposed new *Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedure for assignment extensions, exam postponement, and board consideration applications* be approved with effect from September 2012 (see separate paper).

## 5 Review of standard assessment regulations

5.1 The University had implemented a set of new revised assessment regulations for taught awards in September 2011 following annual consideration of feedback by QASG. Members were now asked to consider comments received since from Schools and external examiners.

- i) Pass mark: Members had been asked to consider the use of informal sub-elements of assessments and associated concerns raised by one School. Members discussed the issues highlighted but supported the greater flexibility this practice provided. It was agreed that the importance of appropriate assessment design in relation to ILOs should be reinforced in the University's current guidance, both in terms of the initial design and when subsequent changes are made to indicative assessment.

**Action:** EDQ to include the above in the next review of the relevant Academic Procedures.

- ii) Compensation: The issue of compensation in relation to mitigation was discussed under agenda item 4.2 i).
- iii) Classification: QASG acknowledged the remarks made by one external examiner regarding the profile rule but did not at this stage wish to review the current regulation which had been recently amended to standardise the level of discretion across all boards. The remarks of another external examiner concerning rounding up of borderline marks were noted but it was clarified that this practice did not result in changes to the aggregate mark. The Chair reported that the University may consider introducing award classification for Higher Nationals. Any proposed changes to the Standard Assessment Regulations would be taken to ASC in May.

- iv) Provision for failed candidates: A number of staff had queried whether students should be reassessed in both or all elements of assessment where they have failed at least one formal element of assessment and their marks range from 36 to 39 (or 46-49% for M-level assessments) in the other formal element(s). Members agreed that in this situation students should be assessed in all elements to ensure the overall unit marks will not fall below 40% (or 50%) as compensation cannot be applied to reassessments.

**Action:** EDQ to clarify the above in *Academic Procedure D6 – Use of Assessment Regulations*.

- v) Other issues: Members discussed whether it was helpful to include a full set of assessment regulations in student handbooks and agreed that no change was required to the current practice at this stage. Members also discussed presentation of marks at Assessment Boards and whether formal elements of assessment should be recorded in whole or decimal numbers. It was agreed that one decimal point would be more appropriate than the current two.

**Recommendation:** that Student Administration consider moving to a system whereby formal elements of assessment are presented with one decimal fraction on the Board Report.

**6 Date of next meeting:**

- 6.1 The next meeting would take place on the 13th March.

**7 AOB**

- 7.1 None.