‘The National Role of the External Examiner’

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Context (contd)

• The external examiner system dates back to the 19th century but is still largely confined to the UK and Ireland

• **1997**: Dearing Review recommends strengthening the system through better induction, training and preparation of examiners

• **2000**: QAA publishes its first guidance on external examining (Code of Practice section 4)

• **2003**: ‘The Future of Higher Education’ White Paper reinforces the importance of training and support for examiners
Context (contd)

• **2008-09**: Parliamentary Select Committee report is strongly critical of the EE system and questions whether it remains fit for purpose – proposes a national ‘pool’ of examiners (not taken forward)

• **2011**: Universities UK and GuildHE report finds the system is generally in good order but proposes principles and recommendations for improvement

• **2012**: QAA revises and re-publishes its code of practice (as UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B7)
Context (contd)

- **2014-15**: HEFCE responds to continuing criticism of comparability of standards by (again) proposing a national external examiners’ register.

- **2016**: HEFCE eschews a register in favour of enhanced external examiner training (HEA pilot): “The focus will be to ensure that external examiners are clear about their role and have the requisite technical assessment skills. They will then be better able to provide reliable judgements about the standards set by institutions and the measurement of student achievement against them, such that standards are maintained over time and are reasonably comparable” (HEFCE 2016/03).
Other areas for consideration

• Transparency of the EE role (to students and the public) – inspector or peer reviewer/critical friend?

• Clarification of EE’s powers, e.g. to change marks?

• Role of EEs in supporting quality enhancement (as well as assuring standards)
Expectation (mandatory): “Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners”

Indicators of sound practice:
Indicator 2: Awarding institutions expect their external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations upon whether or not:

- an institution is maintaining the **threshold academic standards** set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements
- the **assessment process** measures student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcomes of the programme(s) and is conducted in line with the institution's policies and regulations
- the academic standards and the achievements of students are **comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions** of which the external examiners have experience.
Indicator 3 - Awarding institutions expect their external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations on:

• **good practice and innovation** relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners

• **opportunities to enhance the quality** of the learning opportunities provided to students.

Indicator 12 - External examiners **submit a report annually**, at a time determined by the institution, to the head of the institution or to one or more named individuals that he/she designates.
Indicator 13 - External examiners' annual reports provide clear and informative feedback to the institution on those areas defined for the role in Indicators 2 and 3 (the core content). In addition, their reports:

- **confirm that sufficient evidence** was received to enable the role to be fulfilled (where evidence was insufficient, they give details)
- state whether **issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed** to their satisfaction
- address any issues as specifically required by any **relevant professional body**
- give an **overview of their term of office** (when concluded).
Edge Hill examiners also

• Approve examination papers (normally at FHEQ L5 upwards) and other assessment material as agreed with the department and comment on any proposed module or (minor) programme modifications

• Visit the University at least once a year to review samples of assessed student work and confirm that assessment including internal moderation has taken place fairly and in line with the validated learning outcomes (examiners of Initial Teacher Education programmes also visit trainees on school placement)
Edge Hill examiners also

- Attend the relevant assessment board(s), commenting on the extent to which the *Academic Regulations* have been applied fairly and consistently, discretion used appropriately and procedures relating to extenuating mitigating circumstances and academic malpractice applied fairly.
- **In exceptional cases**, may be asked to act as arbitrators on borderline cases or may seek to implement changes to marks taking due account of the effect of such changes on the rest of the assessed cohort (‘scaling’)
- Submit their reports within 4 weeks of the relevant assessment board(s)
- Provide written comments on proposed programme modifications/ re-validation
The examiner’s report

• Did the administrative procedures permit you to carry out the role effectively?
• Were you provided with sufficient information relating to the programmes(s) and its/their assessment for you to carry out your duties and responsibilities?
• Have responses by the Programme Team to issues raised in your previous report(s) been satisfactory?
• If you mentored, or were mentored by, another Edge Hill external examiner this year please provide feedback on your experience.
• Please advise if there have been any changes to your employer, employment status or professional, statutory or regulatory body registration this academic year.
• Please comment on how far the assessments reflect the learning outcomes of individual module/programmes.
• Were the assessments appropriately structured and scheduled?
• Did the assessments permit fair and equitable assessment of individual students?
• Was the standard of marking of assessments and their moderation satisfactory? Please consider the quality of written feedback in your response.
• Was there anything in the curriculum or teaching, learning assessment strategy that you feel might be worthy of wider dissemination?
• (Where applicable) Please comment on the assessment of Work-Based Learning (WBL) in the programme
• What is your perception of students’ knowledge and academic skills in the module(s)?

• Are there any improvements that you can suggest that would enhance the student learning experience?

• Are the content and learning outcomes of the modules(s)/programme consistent with the minimum threshold standard for a subject qualification at this level (as defined by the relevant FHEQ level descriptor/s and, where available, subject benchmark statement)?

• Is there evidence that students who pass the modules (at least) achieve the minimum threshold standard?

• Above threshold Pass standard, is the achievement and grading (classification) of Edge Hill students comparable with that of similar programmes with which you are familiar?
• (Where applicable) Are the standards of the module(s)/programme appropriate in relation to PSRB standards and are the students achieving them?
• Please comment on the assessment of practice in the programme, including any engagement with students or visits to practice.
• Are there any additional comments you wish to make about the module(s)/programme that would be of interest to the relevant PSRB?
• Are there any comments you wish to make on specific modules or other aspects of the programmes for which you have responsibility or any other matters you would wish to raise?
• Please specify and comment on any modules that may benefit from early review and modification or re-validation.
References